RESPICE FINEM

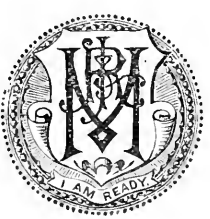
OR

LOVE IN EXILE

A Novel

BY

G. BIANCA HARVEY



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In Memoriam

PREFACE

In the narrative which follows there is an honest endeavour to set forth without prejudice a presentment of the life led at home in Russia and abroad in exile by a political "*suspect*." To Englishmen, whose love of liberty is as the very breath of life, and whose social and moral condition is an honour and a safeguard to all who act for the universal welfare, this record is dedicated of a man's brave struggle for his country's freedom and a woman's perfect devotion.

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RESPICE FINEM

CHAPTER I

THE NOVICE IN RUSSIA

"O, that estates, degrees, and offices
Were not derived corruptly! and that dear honours
Were purchased by the merit of the wearer!"

Merchant of Venice.

It was in the year 18—. The demonstrations of the students in Russia were becoming stronger and stronger, and great alarm was felt by the Government on account of the rapid propagation of Nihilistic views among all classes. New secret societies had been formed, the old leagues increased in a great degree, and the vigilance of the police was not penetrative against disguise and that common feeling

which bound the adherents to the creed and aims of the renowned Tchermysherski.

In the principal room of one of the most fashionable mansions in St. Petersburg sat two men and a woman, the latter leaning back in an easy-chair. At length, lifting her head, she glanced across at her companions, saying, "You may trust a woman's instinct, Count, when you might not rely on her reason. Baron Pointesky, I feel sure, is suspected by the *Pristav*, and in spite of his evading them as regards his *podorogina*, and by his various disguises, he will only live to rue his recklessness."

"I forgot to tell you that he has returned, and is coming to your reception to-morrow," remarked one of the men, rising. "But, Countess, we will not keep you now, as it is late. Till to-morrow—adieu!"

"Nay, Count," continued his wife, as this she was, "I must beg you to listen yet a moment to me. Have you heard that Aileen has decided to stay with us another year instead of returning to her English guardian?"

"Yes, I had an interview with her yesterday. I am glad of it, Marie, since you seem to care for her so much."

The two gentlemen had reached the screened doorway, where they bowed and disappeared from view. No sooner had the curtain fallen than the Countess Hevna called sharply, "Maïda, Maïda!" In answer to her summons, a short woman, attired in the national costume, advanced over the carpet and stood beside her mistress.

"Tell Mademoiselle Harford that I wish to speak to her."

As the woman withdrew, the Countess rose and commenced pacing up and down the room. She was seen to be tall and admirable in figure, though plain in face; but there were courage and determination in the somewhat full jaw and prominent forehead. One of the leaders of society by right of her birth and property, her apparent lack of interest in politics kept her from being suspected of any finger in the pie of public affairs. Somehow, even the disciples of Lavater failed to conjecture, if they gave this quiet woman a thought, what she would do or dare.

Presently the smart click of high heels in the corridor announced the arrival of the rich and somewhat eccentric ward of the count and countess.

She was a young lady of about twenty, whose Irish-grey eyes and pale yet piquant features were charming from their ever-changing expression.

Hastening over to the lady of the house with a gliding step, she joyously ejaculated:

"Well, Marie, at your call, I come, though in the last agony of composing the last line to my last poem."

Her friend looked at her fondly before replying:

"You will meet the Baron to-morrow evening, *chérie!* The Count has just told me of his return."

"What! this hero about whom every one of your particular friends has such a different opinion. What do you think Catherine Stavisk told me of him the other day when we were at her house? Just this: that his father had been banished years ago to Siberia because he expressed an opinion that a Czar might err. Ivan Pointesky himself, Catherine says, had spent the scanty fortune his mother left him in the patriotic cause —six or seven thousand roubles. But is it true he subsists on a paltry thousand roubles a year?"

"Quite true," was the grave answer; "and, moreover, out of that manages to help others!"

"Why, he is a downright hero, this Baron of yours! Politics, as a rule, do not make a man less selfish than his neighbours after he has attained power. Promises become like pie-crust then, and tongues soon learn wisdom born of place!"

There was apparently no desire on the Countess's part to encourage Miss Harford to pursue this train of conversation. On the contrary, she somewhat abruptly said:

"Aileen, my dearest, are you really content to remain with us still longer?"

"Quite so; I am happy here, and have at this moment no wish ungratified, unless," she hastily subjoined, with a smile, "it be the acquisition of some of your national melodies. I do not mean the manufactured German strains, or the gipsy stuff that comes from No-man's Land, but the genuine music which reeks of the soil and is clear as the deep river ice. Only this afternoon, at Vera Sovna's, I heard several of these old songs. Let me tell you, Marie," she went on, with a touch of pathos, "there is an undercurrent of sadness running through them, as in

the Irish effusions. It is a kind of longing for the unattainable—shall I say, for the happiness only coming with freedom ?"

The Countess laid her hand affectionately, but impressively, on the girl's round shoulder.

"Aileen, I will not have you mixing yourself up in our political troubles !" cried she. "Your father was an Englishman, and would not wish, had he lived, to see his daughter meddling with foreign politics ; and I entreat your refraining from any remarks, even about this revolutionist movement ; or, much as I love you, I shall write to your guardian and tell him I will not be held responsible for you, and you will have to go home."

"Do not distress yourself, Marie ! Speech was given as much to conceal our thoughts as to reveal them, and a smiling surface sometimes hides very deep and vexed whirlpools."

"You are a strange girl, Aileen ; but be careful, I pray you."

"Yes, for both our sakes, yours particularly. And now, as it has struck twelve, I shall seek repose."

With an affectionate kiss, the girl sped along the well-heated passages to her room, leaving the Countess

to marvel at the subtle and far-reaching constrictor of revolution, which flung a coil around even this daughter of a foreigner, and threatened to draw her closer to the others in the deadly ring.

CHAPTER II

THE SELF-PRESENTATION

"By a divine instinct, men's minds mistrust
Ensuing danger; as by proof we see
The waters swell before a boisterous storm."

Richard III.

On the following evening the Countess's reception room presented a brilliant scene. She herself seemed not the least gay of that careless throng. Looking at the bright faces and listening to the merry laughter and unfettered music, who would have guessed that here stalked avenging spirits, only abiding the signal hour to effect some appalling change, and wrest away the liberty, both mental and moral, so dear to them and so long imprisoned in the coffers of the State; and that, beside them,

inseparable as their shadows, the spy and detective promenaded, danced and flirted, listening for incriminatory phrases between the compliments, and clues to *rendezvous* amid the flatterings ?

Aileen, with a woman's natural coquetry, had arrayed herself in her most becoming dress to meet the redoubtable Baron, one who held the wires in his hands, like a galvanist, which would haply inspirit even the corpse-like victim of despotism into some state more like noble life. Little did the still girl believe what control he did possess over the high-thinking as well as over those who were merely unreasoning puppets at his beck.

Aileen's creamy satin fitted close to the full, graceful figure. But both head and arms were destitute of ornament, save a small collar of pearl and bog-oak, unique in that assemblage, encircling her neck. She was leaning against a sofa head, idly watching the groups passing and re-passing, when almost unconsciously those words of Bossuet escaped her lips, of which we give an English equivalent: "Let man do his utmost, and still his nothingness is manifest."

Immediately a strange voice uttered the quotation of Villefré, in the same tongue, with a truer accent:

"To which my answer is: 'A hair is a poor little thing, but it casts a shadow!'"

With a natural annoyance and astonishment, Aileen turned and confronted this intruder on her meditations. He was a tall, slender man of about forty, perhaps two or three years younger, and wearing the plainest evening dress. His face was stern, and wore traces of care and fatigue. But the steel-blue eyes, piercing beneath affectedly drooping lids and sharp aquiline features, evinced power and self-control. A thin, pointed moustache hid a determined mouth. With a profound bow Baron Ivan Pointesky —for it was he—introduced himself in a few courteous words, as only anticipating the presentation which had been promised him and to which he had been looking forward. He added, quietly, "What a strange reflection yours was—from a young lady in the height of a ball!"

"A ball!" returned she, looking up into his eyes, which were almost at once partly veiled. "A ball-room is just one of those centres of *agitation* where everything converges. The wallflowers are very deadly, Baron, and the gayest cavaliers ofttimes whisper maxims to their partners. If I said anything serious

it was only what many in this room must be thinking."

"What makes you imagine such a thing?" he said, with a faint smile which did not escape her.

"Do you think I am not aware that there are many persons here not merely suspected of opposition to the Government, but actually outlawed? Besides, if I may go on, I am under the impression that none other than you, Baron, manipulate these Irreconcileables."

"You do me too much honour, Mademoiselle, in making me of so much consequence," he answered, like one who knew the ground where he stood, and was not surprised at this rash challenge for him to avow his treason.

Still, his slight smile seemed to hint that her decidedly un-Russian bluntness was not displeasing, and continuing the same tactics of taking her surmise as well-grounded, she said, looking coaxingly into his set countenance—and few Russians know how insinuating is the winningness of our English girls:

"Dear Baron, won't you please tell me the scope and meaning of this movement in Russia

for an improvement in the ruling powers, to put it thus mildly. I must learn it somewhere, and nobody will tell me. There's my friend the Countess! She declares I am too indiscreet to have anything told me concerning politics."

The Baron came a step or two nearer so as to have no need to raise his voice, and in a tone, jocular and sarcastic at the outset, but involuntarily growing sincere as he marked the loyalty of his auditress, he said:

"It is true. A foreigner cannot learn anything from the press. And if his or her associates are dumb, he or she may pass through Russia and return home dreadfully uninformed. But what do I know myself?—no more, nor less, than my neighbour. The mysterious, intangible 'they' say: some body of discontented spirits are preparing, based on the widespread dissatisfaction, the first step towards an entire reconstruction of society. The commencement must be a sudden, economical reform—I should say, revolution. We must have liberty, we must have no more of this slavish ignorance that prevents our lower classes from even feeling what chains grind them down. Soon there will issue again such pro-

clamations as will stir up the hearts of our youths. When at Moscow, the other week, forty of our best students in the colleges were initiated in one lodge of the most dreaded secret society. But," he said, checking himself as he found he was animated and had kindled her eyes, " is this the sort of elucidation you are seeking ?"

" Yes, yes ; but kindly answer me this question. You cannot mean to assert that wholesale or individual slaughter—ugly word, but allow it for truth's sake—you can never mean that this course, I say, can tend to humanise or elevate the masses. It is a Jesuitical argument, that the end justifies the means, I know ; but it seems to me that till the masses recognise fully their needs, any league will work in vain."

" The Countess has taught you well," observed the Baron, calmly.

" The Countess has taught me nothing. I have eyes and brains, and being to a certain extent unprejudiced, or, rather, not having been taught my lesson till I was old enough to understand it, I can both admire and blame parts of its method. And though I can understand Socialism, in a political

and philanthropic sense, I cannot understand it in a religious one."

"We do not profess to teach religion," answered the other, with the half-amazed, half-amused expression of the dancing-man, to whom his Scotch partner applied between the lancers and country-dance for a discourse on "Love in the abstract."

"Let each man act as an enlightened mind and clear conscience dictates."

Aileen raised her eyes with a strangely prophetic look, saying:

"No cause can prosper where the fundamental principle of religion is absent."

"My dear young lady, is not patriotism one kind of religion? At all events, as I believe, these professors on whose creed you are sounding me maintain that the first thing they have to teach the mass is to think, and then comes the more serious question, what the thought shall be about. As you appear somewhat versed in saws and sayings, may I suppose that you know and approve the assertion of Voltaire? —Voltaire in a ball-room!—but, after Bossuet, he may pass, eh?—'Never can Heaven be pleased by evil done to mankind.' They say this is the Russian

Materialists' creed. But quite enough and to spare of such dry stuff! So, surely you dance, or do you prefer quizzing the company?"

"Ah, no, I love dancing! I had only finished a splendid waltz ten minutes before you came up."

"Then may I ask for this one?"

A spin with a genuine Nihilist! it was realising romance with a vengeance. She accepted the offer, and was soon all the more glad she had done so, as her partner was an accomplished one. As Aileen's feet flitted rapidly over the polished oak, her eyes sparkled with happiness. She was young, and, in spite of her philosophical studies, dearly loved amusement. At last, as the music died away, the pair passed out of the super-heated room into a corridor profusely decorated with flowers. Here they found a sofa in a cosy corner, not so remote but that the echo of the rising music could arrive and coax the ear into vague attention.

"Have you come to live in Russia?" asked the gentleman, as he seated himself beside Aileen, and leaned his head against the cushioned back with what was aristocratic "repose" in him, though in another the action might have seemed scarcely correct.

"For a year, and perhaps longer. It depends upon circumstances. I am very happy here without being clear as to the reason why."

"Enjoy your sensations—do not attempt to dissect or analyse them! That would soon spoil your enjoyment."

In the pause that ensued Aileen was revolving thoughts of her own, whilst the Russian eyed her with the same charmed and amused air. At length it was she who broke the silence abruptly by asking leave to put a question to him—one most intimately personal. He bowed and shrugged his shoulders a little, as if the eccentricity of an English girl was, after all, only the natural act of an overgrown child.

"Go on. I shall not think you rude, and I will answer you honestly."

"Then, then, is it true that you—I mean one of your acquaintances, nobly born but reduced to an income of but a couple of thousand of roubles, was so reduced by giving up the rest of his property to further the patriotic cause?"

He looked at her fixedly.

"I daresay many of my acquaintances act in that

manner. That is, many I used to regard as veritable angels when rich, and are now but poor devils. If, however," he went on with more gravity, "you allude to one person in particular who has no secrets from me, I own that he has acted thus. I warrant that he will not be rejoiced to learn that his pecuniary affairs are the talk of the town, though. Curious people you English are! to deem it strange that a man should hold his country's good or his fellow-countrymen's weal at a higher value than gold. My reflections on the subject have taught me that the little happiness money can purchase dies with one; the good it may bring to others lives when the owner is forgotten."

He was cool, but a hot blush coloured his hearer's face.

"As for me, I possess six thousand roubles a year, and, except in charities for lifeboats, for soldiers and sailors and the like, I spend the rest on myself."

"A very worthy object on which to spend it."

He laughed grimly whilst she shook her head at the tone.

"Be that as it may, I daresay I could lay it out more profitably; but we all improve, especially when

we have teachers in charming young ladies who pursue us even in ball-rooms with pages of the philosophers, from Voltaire to—— What is the latest intellectual idol you young lady-students are worshipping?"

"Herbert Spencer, I believe. At least I am hovering over his works. But, hush! Marie does not know it—must not know it, or I should catch such a long lecture! I study it on the sly in my painting-room."

"So you paint? What an enchanting occupation!"

"Yes; but I am not clever at it. My favourite art, the love of my heart, is music."

The Baron turned with a bright glance in his awakening eyes. "Then you might sing to me sometimes when I have an idle moment. For I love music as passionately as possible."

An apparently amorous couple came down the corridor. The Baron added in an audible voice: "'Glinka's Life for the Czar,' for example, contains some gems; but over and above the melodies, which may even compare with the Italians, of the calibre of Mercadante, one must admire the pervading theme

—the sentiment of unswerving devotion to the powers that be, and notably the supreme head of the State. Ah! to die for the Emperor! all Russian hearts are surcharged with that sentiment!"

The couple passed on, all the while seeming self-absorbed. When they were out of earshot, the Baron looked merrily at Aileen, and remarked, rising:

"There is a move for home now. As a native to the manner reared, what think you of that essay at Blarney? Allow me to leave you with the Countess. I have an appointment."

"At midnight?"

"The conspirators' hour! Ha, ha!" And with a light step, humming the last waltz-tune to which they had circled, the Baron departed.

CHAPTER III

THE SUB-STRATUM

"What is a man if his chief good and market of his time be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more. Sure, He that made us with such large discourse, looking before and after, gave us not that capability and Godlike reason to rust in us unused."—*Hamlet.*

BARON POINTESKY was a remarkable man. From boyhood the cause to which he had devoted money and sacrificed time had been his sole passion. Too cold in temperament to be led into the rash acts of which many of his countrymen were guilty, he had hitherto escaped suspicion. A man of great resource and prudence, the Revolutionists both loved and feared him. "That man has no heart," a frivolous lady of fashion had once said in his hearing; and he had answered in his courteous manner, "Madam,

the heart is a mouth-*organ*, which is the amusement of one or two at most, and not the entertainment of many. I beg only to attend to those instruments which are never dangerous and are always useful."

But the words of the young foreigner, and the approach upon him, whilst in confabulation with her, of the couple whom he recognised as upper-class informants to the high police, sharpened his wariness.

On leaving the Countess's, the Baron called a *tarantass*, and bade the *yemschirk* drive to a meeting not many doors off, held in the house of a friend. It was ostensibly one of those gatherings of gentlemen of leisure to discuss the pretensions of the newest arrival: opera singer, opera dancer, bevy of figurantes, German professor with a fresh sanitary "fad," French poet with a novel "ballade" founded on an episode in Russian history (of which his audience were profoundly ignorant), or what not as evanescent. But after the dullards, the worthless and the dubious, would be "crowded out" or "bored" into departure, the remnant would dwell on the one subject filling all feeling hearts: how the subjection, nay, slavery of the lower classes was to be removed,

and such laws be enacted as would add both socially and mentally to their happiness. Willing propagators of this new theory were to be found in numbers; but they had to be careful lest the very men they sought to raise by education should, through fear or ignorance, betray them at the very outset of the philanthropic task. It takes a long time to make a dog out of a wolf.

So far, at least, the Baron was but a mild type of revolutionist. This kind, if progressive, become more inveterate under oppression than those who begin by being fervid. He advocated such hopeless objects as free speech and free press, and, perhaps, a ministry responsible to the people. But a republic he neither believed in nor would have fought for, and hence more violent promoters of internal disturbance found fault with such a lukewarm adherent.

He aimed at the elevation of the masses, not self-aggrandisement, and recognising the principle at its worth, derided the principle of "Down with all but myself!" He agreed that a superior power was necessary to rest upon and yet be moved by the supporters. Only these supporters must know the

popular wants, and strive to gratify them when they did not absorb their gains from the possessions of others. For this upholding the maintenance of property the propertyless, of course, denounced him.

Most of the perplexity in which he dwelt arose from the state of Russia. Elsewhere the people may assemble in vast numbers for the purpose of redressing grievances, and there can be no great diversity of opinion on the essential points for any length of time. But where the right of public meeting is withheld, and where no one dares accept the office of spokesman, that deep-seated egotism which pervades all judgments, and which the least vain and ambitious men exhibit in a more or less degree, makes it an impossibility for the nation to move as one community.

It was with, therefore, grave forebodings of the struggle inevitable between those whom he was to meet this evening and himself that the Baron passed up the broad staircase and turned into a small chamber, where were held these private meetings. Pushing a heavy curtain aside, he entered to find a group of six or seven men smoking and apparently engaged at cards.

"We have been waiting only for you," said one, hurriedly. "Have you heard the news?"

"What news?" said the Baron, seating himself at the table, and looking calmly at the speaker.

"That Isminski and Maack are both taken."

Even as the words were uttered a silence fell on the group.

"That means banishment for life at the least." The Baron's voice deepened in bitterness as he continued: "Have you any suggestion to make, gentlemen, before I report the result of my journey? None, eh? When I was in Moscow, whither, as you are aware, I went to test the students' unanimity and sincerity, and through them those of the poorer classes with whom they 'worked,' I found I was closely followed. I therefore left secretly, and in the disguise of a carpenter I came in contact with Anna Poloff, who had taken a situation as lady's companion, and from a secret despatch—oh! have no fear; non-existent!—she had learned it by heart and destroyed it—I learnt that several agitators—amongst them Isminski and Detri, by the way—were down in the black list as suspicious customers, to be dogged and spied."

As the second name passed the Baron's lips, a young fellow at the other end of the table started up.

"My brother put under surveillance, you say?" he cried fiercely; "this overbrims my cup. Nothing shall stay my hand now from ridding his steps of at least one of his sleuth-hounds."

A murmur of assent rose from the other men. The Baron alone sat quietly surveying his delicate white hands as if nothing unusual had been said to interrupt his manicural inspection. But suddenly breaking in upon a fiery hubbub complimenting and encouraging the youthful rebel, his voice rose soothingly.

"Friends," it ran, "still the time is not yet ripe for action; individual murder, or on a large scale for that matter, does not advance our cause, nay, I maintain, retards it. The people, as a rather clever young foreign lady remarked of late to me, require to be educated to accept the responsibilities which a successful issue of the present movement will bring on them. At present they have neither the wit nor learning for that success to avail them."

"Bah! they can go to school after clearing out the nobles' mansions and the useless Government palaces

for educational purposes," interrupted an elderly gentleman, in the uniform of a superior military officer, who had impatiently waited so far.

"Exactly, if men who have acquired the use of weapons can be easily induced to lay aside the bayonet and sword for the pen and blackboard pointer. A man can learn the soldier's drill in a month, but it takes years to drill the citizen. Hear me out, brothers," he pursued, rising, a glow lighting up his eyes. "These men have years of slavish ignorance, of intellectual fetters, of darkness, to emerge from, and till they so emerge we on the bank cannot lend them a hand."

"Cast them ropes!"

"They will think we mean to bind them again, or, haply, hang them!" was the sarcastic response. "By deeds of violence what do we gain? the name over all Europe as assassins."

"Europe!" they repeated with a sneer.

"Well, that out of the question, every violent act breeds other acts of violence—in the retaliation for the one wretch stricken down hundreds of innocent as well as guilty men and women are banished, or imprisoned in such dungeons as are but

drains for the rest of the Continent, or, luckier still, hanged offhand. There are not enough of us yet to rebel. We should revolt, not execute a revolution."

"Brutus, and Tell, and Hofer—these were once but of a score, not of a nation."

"They were men with the talent to attract others into a solidarity with them—fated to be the central nodule in a conglomerate mass. Our system is intelligent, but the body is not homogeneous. We should be shattered if we moved in a mass."

"So is a case of canister shattered on striking," remarked the old soldier; "but, nevertheless, it destroys the marshal and his staff where it explodes."

"And some corporal takes the fallen sword and turns it into a sceptre."

"We will terrify them into submission," exclaimed a fair golden-haired boy who sat at the end of the table, admitted for his name's sake, his precocious exalted patriotism, and his being the last scion of a line of which every flower had been cropped and every branch broken off by the State.

"More easily said than done. I am heart and soul in this struggle for a people's rights. Most of you know I have never refused to sacrifice money,

time, or personal immunity to aid it; but heedlessly to bring ruin on ourselves, and bring such a great work, too, into bad repute among foreigners is madness. What is our credit abroad now? Can we raise money on the open market like the hands unstained by regicide? Why use intemperate measures when we can succeed, if slowly still surely."

"But no gentle measures avail. Force alone can succeed now," was the elder man's quick reply. "The Government will grant nothing, it has granted nothing for fifty years of my remembrance, save under compulsion. Are we merely to pin a protest to the palace doorpost and look on from a distant housetop to see what lackey contemptuously tears it down and tosses it unread into the kennel?"

"A protest!" exclaimed their host. "It needs none now. The Government is aware of our wishes, what in justice we have a right to; but while the bureaucrats have command of the police and army, they are stronger than we, and will hold out."

"And remember also," broke in the Baron's calm voice, "we are contesting a body to be reckoned as a foe with one purpose, whatever each individual opinion—namely, to maintain power. Much

cannot be done when men wrangle among themselves as we do on how to reform the offices not yet in our grasp. We are scattered, too, all over the realm, our means of communication are occult, and consequently slow and not always manageable. We are often obliged to rely on men anxious to serve us as faithfully as we do them, but who can be led to betray by a careless slip of the tongue. Mind you, I speak of cases far and wide between; but what have these few mishaps cost us? The imprisonment, ay, and death of trusty friends. Xerxes could afford to lose thousands—Leonidas was lost when his little band was decimated."

A profound silence followed these words, and lasted till the host, acquiescing with the speaker in his caution, expressed the general feeling that he was not sufficiently sanguine. "A pity the Czar shuts his ears to the cries and his eyes to the wretchedness of his subjects."

The Baron turned sharply, for he was always eager to do justice even to a foe. "The Czar," said he warmly, "the Czar is not the fiction of old, but as we see him without the veil, a being not responsible

for all that happens; or, perhaps, news does not penetrate his palace walls; but still an autocrat should know more of both kingdom and subjects. Let him say the people shall have complete liberty of press and speech, and no Government officials, however corrupt or high in power, dare gainsay it."

"Believe that," sneered the old military officer, "and you will never more drink wine—but the water of Siberian snows. All our woes spring from this fable, worse than the opposite one that gulled our fathers: then the Father of all the Russians was believed to be above human sensations, and was no more appealed to than a wooden idol. Now ye humanitarians esteem him mere man, and bid us hope he will act like one some day. As they say his heart bleeds for the pangs of the people, which he cannot remedy, I agree with our young friend: his heart must bleed, literally. Farewell, friends, I go to sharpen my sword!"

CHAPTER IV

GERMAN DANCE AND RUSSIAN SONG

"To thine own self be true; and it must follow,
As the night the day, thou canst not then
Be false to any man."—*Hamlet.*

NOT long after Aileen's first meeting with the Baron, she was invited to another ball after dinner at a friend's house. The repast was served in strict Russian fashion, each guest walking in with any lady he preferred. Aileen thus fell to the lot of a young officer in the Imperial Guards, a very tall and handsome youth, with persuasive brown eyes. His English was like Aileen's French, not the best; but still, they managed to get on excellently together and enjoyed a lively interchange of ideas, principally on the

relative superiority of English or Russian etiquette and manners.

The Countess, who sat opposite, looked on well pleased. The young gentleman was a Michilof, and held a good position at Court, where he was a general favourite. But the English girl sat blissfully unconscious of the Countess's plans building on this head for her future, and was rather startled when, on rising from the table, she noted the formal bow and kiss over their hostess's hand from her cavalier as she quitted the room.

"What a charming piece of courtesy," she said, laughing back at the young officer, who was hastening after her to demand a dance.

"You will not refuse me?" he pleaded, as she paused at one of the windows and seated herself in the recess.

"No, I will even give you three—not one more, though. Indeed, I am not discreet in being so generous as it is. But look! there comes Vera Sovna, and, oh! who is the portly gentleman leaning on her?"

"That is Sor Vichili, one of our famous chiefs of the division of police especially employed to guard

the Imperial family, the ministers, and the heads of State departments."

"A detective?"

"Well, that may be the cold English of it. In any case, he is one of our most noted officials for discovering the traitors who dare to raise their voices and even their hands against their anointed Emperor!"

He fired up with enthusiasm and indignation as he spoke, while she gazed with some interest, not to say awe, upon the personage beside her lady friend.

"Judging by your fervour, you are not even cognisant of there being among your comrades one or two, so report saith, who belong to the palace guards merely to lay denunciatory notes, revelations of official robberies, and, maybe, grenades on the Emperor's writing desk?" so Miss Harford remarked with a forced smile.

"I!" he ejaculated. "I would scorn to wear this uniform, to bend my knee before my sovereign, if I harboured one thought against him!"

"Well said," she answered.

Then, glad to have the prelude of the waltz come to her aid, she added, "But such troublesome

thoughts are gone clear from my head at so lively a strain. Do you not adore German waltzes? Is not that one you will dance to?"

"With you?—yes; though it were over the proverbial volcano!" And away the two went whirling into the eddying throng.

In spite of her intense love for amusement and her brisk manners, Aileen was not the butterfly an onlooker must now have thought her. Each day she looked more clearly into the lake, and saw that at the bottom the water was boiling and that the sediment was rising.

A mixture of strength and weakness, like all her sex in youth, the trivialities died off each day one by one, and the stem throve all the better for these expelled excrescences. Under the usually smiling features was an indomitable will, under the gleaming eyes a passion not speedily to be exhausted. Already she cultivated reserve, particularly when those graver matters cropped up, as they will in a society which tries to exclude jarring topics; so will the blocks of granite pierce up through the glacier, and finally ride triumphant and independent on the icy flow.

The movement interested her so soon, yet bid fair to engross her. Her insight was already keen. Though the materialistic views so prevalent amongst her congeners pained her to begin with, she was forced to admire the facility with which argument was maintained and opinions supported. And, indeed, the place taken by her sex at this crisis of affairs was a revelation to her. In the empire of veneered barbarism women were coming to the front, just as in the seats of civilisation. Young women of all classes, noble and peasant, alike shared the dangers which menaced husband, father, or friend. Where a woman's courage or cunning could be employed, she grasped the opportunity. Exile, death, and torture were powerless to check this new thirst for liberty which was animating the gentler souls of the Russian people. Princesses allowed that the populace deserved a voice in matters affecting them. Autocracy was too monstrous a thing to be tolerated when every other nation had been emancipated from such moral slavery. "Justice" was the word in which was crystallised the manifold desires, the one object which, being attained, would be the harbinger of all other reforms.

Baron Pointesky came in late. He was looking pleased, and his smiling redoubled as he saw Aileen dancing away merrily with the young guardsman. He made no effort to speak to her till, with a sigh of enjoyment, she sank upon an armchair not far off, and began to fan herself with a vigour surprising enough when she was so fatigued. Leisurely strolling around to her, he ventured to take the nearest seat.

"Have you only just come?" she said, starting at his sudden appearance.

"Yes, and hastened to pay my homage at once to the queen of beauty. Excuse the revival on this occasion only of the language of chivalry."

"I wish you would not pay me any compliments," she said, suddenly looking up into his eyes. "One expects them from ordinary people; but, somehow, I do not like them from you."

That made him cease to smile, and he sat with such a confirmed muteness that she felt bound to continue. "Real friends do not pay compliments when they meet. And I should like to be real friends with you, because I think that you saw very early that I am not quite so frivolous as others imagine me, or, in fact, as they imagine all girls to be."

Instead of showing delight at the offer, he looked grave.

"If it is any pleasure for you to consider me a friend, do so. But surely there are younger and brighter men among your acquaintances better fitted to be your friends."

"No," she answered regretfully; "they please me when I am gay, but there are many hours, even in one day, when I sit and dream of things that they would never believe me capable of brooding over."

"Dear me! what? Oh, Herbert Spencer again!"

"I have learnt recently not to tell new friends, even, all my musings," she answered, with a sly smile.

"Quite right. Dance with them, sing to them, but talk to them not! Apropos of singing, how are you getting on with your project to acquire our national melodies?"

"You have touched the prepared spot in my armour, my lord! I have learned several songs already, and for the matter of that, the Countess said I might ask you to come next Saturday and take *chai* with us. Will you?"

Her eyes were so full with eagerness, that he nodded quickly.

"And thank you very much for giving me such a treat, as you English say."

"Wait till you hear me before you venture such a rash opinion," she answered saucily; "and though my translation of the Russian words into English may not be faithful, faithful I shall be to the significance—the love of native land, the thirst for liberty that they express."

CHAPTER V

THE FOLDS MULTIPLY

"There is no love-broker in the world can more prevail in man's commendation with woman than report of valour."
—*Twelfth Night.*

"MARIE, I am off to Vera Sovna's, to hear her sing."

And without waiting for an answer, down the wide steps sprang our heroine, humming a ballad that was, for a wonder, gay—a very image of unclouded happiness.

She found her friend working at embroidery, which, however, she flung down as her visitor entered, and came forward to greet her with a bright smile lighting up her usually sad face.

"You are in time for tea. Olga has just

brought in the *samovar*," she said, kissing the cheek presented to her.

Aileen took a seat and went through the polite farce of pretending she liked the tea, in which floated a slice of lemon, to her taste as yet a poor substitute for milk or sugar.

In spite of their different characters and education, these two girls had become fast friends, and to Aileen there was no more delicious hour than one given up to listening to the singing and playing of the Muscovite maiden, who made so much of the weird airs. So she sat on, too spell-bound to mark that the shadows began to darken.

The tunes varied as if by an erratic composer, now swelling out powerfully beneath the firm touch of the thin white fingers, like a charging song; then dying away into one of those sad minor keys which seem the fit interpreters of sorrow. Suddenly Vera lifted her hands, as if the keys had turned to vipers, and twisted round, saying:

"Pardon me, dear. That was the last piece I ever played to my father when the police agents stole in on us and dragged him from me. Nine days after he was banished to Siberia, and I left as orphaned, alone

with my old nurse. My life was lonely in the extreme, till I made the acquaintance of Michael Demidoff, who is now my affianced. Ah! darling, you must all grant that he is one of those few men whom none could refrain from loving; he is so good, with all his unflinching bravery, so true in his love for me, though the very favourite of the Court beauties."

"Well, dear, you both love! be happy, then, not doleful."

"I was, I was, until——"

"Go on; what has happened?"

"Until he joined the League of Freedom with Michilof."

"Another! Dear me! What an admirable actor M. Michilof is, then, and the impudence to deny to my face that there could be any traitor in the ranks of his regiment. Well, if he can look me in the face again after brazening that out, he will surprise me."

"One must wear the mask, dear. Alas! such a necessity for subterfuge alarms me. Think that he loves the daughter of a banished rebel!"

"I wish they would label their members, this league. I do not know whom to chat with in

company. It seems not to matter, for your companion the other night was pointed out to me as an inspector of police."

"Old Vichili? Ah, he kindly gave me some particulars about my father's life in exile."

"Oh, they are useful, then, to the community, these police officials—they are the newsmen?"

"Yes; and when good-humoured, like Vichili, they impart agreeable tittle-tattle. He told me, for example, of the latest conquest."

"What! has Russia bit off another piece of our poor Indian frontier?"

"No, no, a conquest of the heart. He says that Andrew Michilof has been smitten by your bright eyes."

Aileen frowned.

"What nonsense! I hardly know who you mean—that is, he is a rather nice young man. I should imagine him more 'killing' as a soldier than as a lover; but what do you mean by reckoning him my capture? I heard he was engaged."

"No, not yet; though he is supposed to have admired some young lady before you came to Russia."

"Then he had better continue to admire her," was the blunt response. "I have not the slightest intention of interfering with your sweet belles so that they should jangle out of tune, or, for that matter, of being married, or falling in love. I hate this imagining that a girl can have no higher aim in life than fretting about husband-trapping."

"Ah, wait, Aileen, and I may hear you change your key."

"No, I doubt it. But, hark! the *dvornik* challenges some arrival at the gateway, and you colour up; 'tis the sweetheart, for a thousand pounds. Well, I will leave you. St. Michael is chasing this poor daughter of Eve away, as he did her great-great-grandmother, ha! ha!"

She, indeed, left Vera to meet her lover, whom she had not seen for a period that she esteemed as a long one. He answered that he was studying to pass an examination at the School of Military Mines, and hoped thereby to stand better for lieutenancy. He came in a gay mood, and she brightened up in order to chime in with him. She talked of a festival at hand, and he made her promise to attend it, and to go on the river next day for a water-picnic. As

long as they were in company she was satisfied; in fact, overjoyed, if one could surmise anything by the tremor in her voice in her simple assent.

"By the way, who was that who flitted by me in the lobby?" he inquired. "A downright pretty face, but roguish."

"Yes, and as good as she is pretty. I love her much. But you soon forget your partners, sir. That is the young *protégée* of Countess Hevna's, your companion at the ball."

"Ah! who sounded my friend Michilof so overtly, as only a foreigner would do, on tokens of disaffection in the Imperial body-guard. What a fetterless tongue!"

"Would you be afraid to run the gauntlet again? I should like her to be of the picnic."

"Capital! at least, the fishers of the Neva cannot repeat the perilous phrases they may hear."

"I know another to make a *partie carreé*. The Baron Pointesky."

"The Baron? Whew! I doubt we shall have the pleasure of his company."

"Is he so engaged?"

"Yes, and he is under the ban of the police.'

"He suspected, too? Oh! Michael, when I hear of these secret meetings and journeys in disguise, and think of what discovery brings in its train, I am tempted to wish you had never joined the Revolutionists!"

"Vera, you must not be the first to discourage me."

"No, no, forgive me; but, ah! my love, remember that you are all I have to love in the world now, all I have to live for. Whenever we part the dread settles down on me that we meet never again! Robbed of father, and then of beloved, what misery would be mine!"

"Pshaw! enjoy the moments we are accorded. Write to the Baron, rely on me arranging the details intelligently, and hey for a happy day of oblivion about the troubles of the State!"

Aileen was only too glad to join her friend, and when the Baron and Andrew Michilof met the Countess, who had been prevailed upon to come, and Vera and Demidoff, they all thought that their pet had never been more creditable to her band of lovely womanhood. She was simply enough attired, too, in an Indian silk as light as muslin, pure white, trimmed with red ribbons, and a bunch of deep-toned

carnations at her throat; over all a coquettish straw hat.

Both the younger men, Demidoff the student, and Michilof the guardsman, sprang forward to help her into the pretty boat.

In a short time, it was gliding away over the blue waters in the soft, summer air. For a few minutes nothing was said, each one being busied in settling down in place.

Michilof was never long silent, and as he chanced to be again beside his recent partner, he turned to her with a laughing remark about her pre-occupation.

"Yes," she said, rousing herself; "and if you had not spoken I should have most discourteously fallen asleep, I verily believe. There is such a thing as temporary cessation of the thinking powers, especially on a hot summer's day."

"Do you not care for summer, then?"

"Yes, I love it, only very beautiful scenery makes one sad. A glimpse of mundane beauty, I suppose, suggests itself as being merely a feeble counterpart of a higher loveliness."

Her voice lowered as she spoke, and her com-

panion seemed affected with her own seriousness, for he said:

"I do not know what is coming to womankind of late! That's the tone of my old professor in metaphysics! I confess that I never had the courage to attack them face to face—I felt always inclined to sap and undermine them, and blow them up!" He shook his head like a Newfoundlander coming out of water too chilly, and happening to catch the eye of the Countess, hastened to say:

"Oh, Countess, have you heard that Count Herty, cousin of the German ambassador, you know, is about to marry the great Belgian heiress. He has nothing; but she has, I am afraid to repeat how many thousand roubles a year."

"Yes, that's not news! I call it a capital match."

"Capital and interest!"

"Though the chances of happiness would be greater, methinks, if he had some property of his own."

Baron Pointesky had turned round at the first words.

"A poor man has no right to marry, and a proud one would not care to live on his wife's money," said he emphatically.

"Ah!" cried Miss Harford, "that depends on what has made him poor. Poverty is no crime if it be not caused by habits of extravagance."

The sweet smile which was one of his chief attractions crossed the Baron's lips as he looked down at his earnest little neighbour.

"No, it is no crime," said he; "but there are cases when poverty causes love to become a prohibited aspiration!"

"Pooh, Baron, we shall yet see you at some fair lady's feet!" was the student's remark, as he glanced at his betrothed.

A look, almost scornful, passed over the Baron's face as he turned his eyes coldly from them all and seemed to investigate the horizon, like one above earthly inclinations.

"Oh, look there! what a delicious spot to land. Now, ladies, one at a time, please," said Michilof as he held out his hand to Aileen.

She took it, though casting back a glance to see whether the Baron was following. Evidently, he was deeply engaged in his broodings, or interchanging a terse sentence or two with Vera, for he was quite unconscious of the tacit rebuke. Aileen forced a

laugh at the scuttling away of a newt, long sole ruler over this petty domain, and the others smiled in sympathy with as hearty a merriment.

"Dear girl, she is what our English maid calls 'awfully jolly,'" remarked the Countess to her neighbour. "Quite a sunbeam in our house."

"Sunshine," returned Vera, with a look of pain, if not of passing envy. "True, all is sunshine for her up to now."

"Well, she has a good prospect too."

"Yes, I only wish I felt as secure of the future as she does," sighing deeply, for at a glance she saw, for a moment, all the gentlemen together, saying some words perhaps of portent.

Nevertheless, all ran on gaily thenceforth. A listener would have caught not a syllable on which a treasonable charge could have been founded.

The day which commenced with brilliancy parted in a golden glory which cast a spell over the most heedless of the party as the purple tints deepened.

Aileen, an intense admirer of effect, was drinking in the deep red of the heavens, which blended so exquisitely with its reflection in the water, when she heard a firm step behind her not like that of

Michilof or Demidoff, who had been sent away rather smartly for interrupting her contemplation.

It was the Baron. At once her reverie was dispersed. His presence calmed but it invigorated.

"Is it not lovely?" she asked, speaking with the confidence of one who felt sure of being comprehended, "and, like the most perfect pleasures of our lives, alas! the more brilliant, the sooner vanished! The world and we who dwell on it, Arion and his dolphin! when its hues are most beauteous, it is dying! How mad it will be of me, and yet I really am going to attempt to put such a sunset as that into a painting I have on the easel."

"A landscape, then?"

"Yes, but one figure which makes the story clear."

"Tell me the subject?"

"Only an autumn scene. A girl standing by the sea-shore watching the waves, and in the distance a ship sailing away. At her feet fading leaves, those emblems of blighted hopes."

"Ripened hopes, child! the leaves fall at maturity." He sat down by her side on the mossy rocks whilst speaking. "You are guilty of disloyalty to your age! In the ball-room, where you only seemed gay

and light, you were mouthing the musty old weavers of paradoxes, and here you evince anew a proneness for the saddest reflections upon things. And what about your *penchant* for cheerless music?"

"To tell you the truth, I have often wondered myself. I think I am only gay in society because others are gay around me. When I am by myself I have time to indulge in the reverse feelings. It is a law of counterpoise."

"You let the pendulum extend too far in a wrong direction; it will lose its elasticity and fail to return some day. Then you will be melancholia's prey, and society will cut you. Come now, if you remember, you gave me an invitation to tea, and to hear how you had learnt some national songs. The Countess has renewed the invitation. I will answer for her tea being a cup that cheers; will you not select the least lugubrious of the *repertoire* and add to the livening up thereby?"

"Mind you come as early as you can then, because apart from the gay tune which, I see, I must rehearse, I have my portfolio of sketches to show you—English scenery! Not that they would detain a connoisseur long, but the turning them over will

bring up so many memories, that I shall talk away as if never to stop."

"I am good at listening. But here is young Michilof looking for you. A promising soldier, that!"

"I like him very much, but, do you know, I ran away when his back was turned just now. He would see nothing in the sunset but a king in golden armour, cloven and dying in his gore! horrid! does it look like that to you?"

"To me the sun's setting is grand above such similes. I remember as it came, it will come again, and some morning it will gild the faces of a people surrounding the remains of a tyrant slain in the night, and hailing their first day in freedom."

CHAPTER VI

THE PATRIOTIC PROPAGANDA

"Ceremony was but devised at first to set a gloss on faint deeds, hollow welcomes, recanting goodness, sorry ere 'tis shown; but when there is true friendship, there needs none." —*Timon of Athens.*

TRUE to his promise, the Baron entered the Countess Hevna's, where the two friends were only awaiting his coming to give the summons for the inevitable hissing *samovar*.

"We will have the sketches first and then the music," whereupon Aileen took an arm-chair, with a corpulent book on her knees.

"One at a time, Baron, to let your tea get cool."

"You paint fairly," said he, after scanning several of the sheets, with no astonishment at the

unfamiliar scenes; "and the water is tolerable: your colouring is the best part; but you want good lessons and many of them before you would earn bread and cheese at it," he added in a very prosaic way.

"Yes, I know they are not worth much; but it amuses me to paint, however crudely my ideas are embodied."

"Did you paint this one entirely from imagination?" he suddenly inquired. She nodded. The Baron rose and went to the light with the sketch for a closer inspection, for it was admittedly a strange and tragic conception for a young lady to have dwelt upon.

It was the tremulous, timid Aurora, but with a pregnant promise of glory beyond, after a dreadful storm at sea. There extended the still-heaving ocean with the fragments of a wreck scattered far and wide, whilst the wreck itself, the sheer hulk of a ship, rocked on a grating reef, partly submerged. The butt of a broken and cast-out mast was in the foreground, lashed to which the dead body of one mariner was revolving uppermost. Overhead, in an eye of the disappearing clouds, the spirit of the drowned man was visible, seemingly

accompanied by angel forms, all rosily touched by the coming dawn at the same time as they were illumined by a holier, more lovely tinge from a celestial source. The title was, "After the Night-storm of Life, a Perfect Morn." The sketch was a strange one for so young a girl.

"The critic's iron rule must bend before a work like this, the rule, I mean, that the idea in art is secondary to the execution. I cannot criticise this," said he.

She took it from him as he released his hold with a kind of reverence, and replaced it in the portfolio. She forgave his previous sternness after this appreciation of what had thrilled her as something worthy of preserving on canvas. The tea was consumed in peace, but then she started up and went to the piano. This earnestness was the girl's greatest charm. None could trill out the words of some French opera-bouffe with more sparkling *abandon*, or sing the passionate Italian music with greater intensity; and now her face, the light falling full on it, revealed the feeling in each line. As her voice rang out in Warlamoff's "Parting Sorrow" the Baron came nearer to her side.

This man, who had lived years upon years with but one thought as master, stood, under the spell of music, a different being. He seemed once more a boy of seventeen, with fanciful aspirations, and tender dreams. To all, even his intimates, his past life was a sealed book unless they were clear-sighted enough to see the predominant passion to be love of country.

"Poor Vera," said Miss Harford, still playing, but a *piano* passage which permitted her talking above the notes. "This is one of those pitiful strains, reminding me of her and her favourites. But you disapprove of my having the same morbid taste. You laugh at me being so foolish," she went on defiantly.

"Oh, no, not foolish. No sentiment that is real, unselfish, or noble, can be that."

"I go further," she said quickly. "I believe no man or woman who is earnest in living a life with a purpose in it, can help being sad or discouraged at times."

"All excessive emotions are follies alike," said he, "from mere merriment to convulsive grief, from envy to love ; as your bard says, they deserve dark houses and the whip. That is a plunge into real

life, a compulsion to work for daily bread. Well, mourn without cause or laugh upon good foundation, it is all one, but the laughter is more grateful to the ear."

"Oh, if it be fun you want, here comes a butt of it! Look, it is Sor Vichili. Is he fair game, and may I banter him?"

The Baron smiled faintly.

"Civilisation and savagery have their parallels; before the enemy is slain at the stake the squaws torment him. Go you and pin your squibs in the fat deer ere the warriors deal the fatal stroke."

She had not more than half heard him, for she had her eyes on the police functionary, advancing with a bland smile, whereupon she affected a profound terror.

"Do you come into a lady's drawing-room red-handed, sir?" cried she in a comically roughened voice. "Is it true that you have been gobbling up some more Nihilists?"

The *Ispravnik* maintained his official gravity as he replied: "Dear young lady, do not let us have State affairs dragged into this abode of peace. It is true, by the way, that I know things——"

"That would make my young blood run cold—Shakespeare, you know."

"Who did you name?"

"Oh, a poet."

"Poets are——"

"A wicked herd! is that the phrase? But you need not note down William Shakespeare: he is dead and out of fear of capture. But, dear sir," went on the rattle-brain, nestling up to him after the manner of Don Pasquale's ward to that old gentleman when she is deluding him, "does it not give you a headache to have all sorts of secrets to keep. Why, positively, I think that one little tiny one would be the death of me."

There was a general smile, and the police official beamed complacently. Sor Vichili was a cautious, though not particularly clever, man; he made up his mind on the spot that this chatterbox would be the last entrusted with any secret by Revolutionists; and concluded that, if one came to her knowledge, she would, in all probability, divulge it without overmuch pressing. In truth, he was sent here to watch the Baron, for his subordinates had discovered the visits paid by that gentleman to the Countess Hevna.

The latter was seemingly too frivolous and unaddicted to dangerous machinations to be long studied, and as for our heroine, though foreigners are always viewed askant in the Muscovite Empire, and especially the daughters of free Britannia, she was pronounced harmless by this investigator.

Reading his game, the merry girl played her part to perfection: teasing and plaguing the *Pristav* till he hardly knew whether she was in jest or earnest. But withal, there was a charm in her pretended childishness which did not fail to soften the official heart; so that he became what he could on rare occasions be, a genial if superficial companion. And while these two indulged in their double deception, the Baron and Marie Hevna sat and listened, the former somewhat gravely, the latter with some anxiety.

"She is such a heedless child," she whispered, as she stood in the window bay, looking out on the broad street. "I am afraid to trust her with anything at all important."

"You read her wrongly. That girl has the strength and courage of a martyr; only I hope that she will never be called upon to prove it. The more reason to keep her from what we know and do."

"I am in hopes that this Andrew Michilof may in time win her heart. He would be a worthy match for her."

"The officer? humph! Yes, it might be a good thing for *him*. As regards the girl herself, she had better marry a fellow-countryman."

"Do you think so? Well, in any case, I hope she will be happy."

"Ha! what are ye twain complotting about?"

The Countess turned to see Aileen standing beside her, her face full of mischief. But the smile gradually died away, as she observed emphatically: "Mark my words, Marie; that man means mischief. You may choose to keep political affairs a secret from me; but I have ears and eyes, and I use both. If you are wise, Baron, you will give up your journey north for a few weeks."

"Who told you all this?" exclaimed her friend, surprised out of her usual reticence.

"Vera Sovna. Her lover, as a noble and student, is no ignoramus, and he has more than any other at stake. You are all links in the one chain, remember, although it is a chain of different metal to each ring: if one is seized, all the rest can be dragged along at

the heels of the person clutching that one. I could guess, without Sor Vichili's hint, that public places are well watched; but he has let drop that extra detectives are ordered up from Moscow to spy the private resorts. Come, come, for my own sake, let me know what will strengthen my position. It is anything but complimentary to regard me as one whose roof has a tile off!"

"It is for your own peace, child," said the lady. "I have felt it my duty to keep such things from you for your own sake."

"You, a woman, Marie, cannot understand me better than this!" She uttered the reproach carelessly and hastened across to the piano, where she seated herself and commenced playing a vocal waltz, and, singing to it, improvised on the theme, and with the lines adapted to the changed measure of: "From care I am free!"

When, with a rather furious dash at the final chords, Aileen spun round on the music stool, she saw the Baron standing behind her with as solemn a look on his face as a festive Egyptian before whom had suddenly been drawn the ghastly *memento mori* on its sledge.

"Good-bye," said he, saluting.

"You are never going on that mission, though," she exclaimed.

"In twenty minutes I shall have begun it."

"You are mad to go," she returned rapidly. "You will not succeed."

"I can but try," was the calm reply.

"You must not misunderstand me," she continued. "I do not mean that the noblest men are those who achieve a name that the world applauds; for some who fail are not defeated, or, even if defeated, are not dishonoured. But lives may be wasted not only through idleness, but because the stake was placed on a low card."

"Mine is on the court cards, I think," he answered. "So you reason when a man does not succeed in his object, it is because it must be wrong."

"No, I do not mean that, since there are brave deeds and noble efforts never heard of, and never recompensed in this world."

"You forget I am a Socialist, or, rather, Materialist, since you will prefer the fashionable word!

"Well, Socialist or Materialist, I believe that happiness can only be attained by acting in accord-

ance with the laws of one's own nature, and that the good and bad qualities of each are blighted or fostered by the conditions in which society places each person. Do you believe that conflicting religions, contradictory laws, contending Governments, mercenary marriages, all arts of making wealth, by buying cheap and selling dear, of governing the world by falsehood, and so on, can produce beneficial results? The idea is illogical."

"But as men in the past have made mistakes—even the best of them—in their efforts to govern the world well, why should they be better able to do it in the future? The past has given us as keen philosophers, as deep thinkers, and as honest men as we have now. How, then, can we hope to better ourselves?"

Aileen spoke quickly as was her wont when moved; the Baron only smiled.

"No progress from the scratched figure on the primogenital man's hunting-flint to the boar hunt of Sniders? none from the compact code of Lycurgus to that of Napoleon? The Magi of yore stalked about with Greek fire to destroy the hovel of an unbeliever who would not pay his dues: our free-

man will carry an electric battery in a waistcoat pocket, and blast the tyrant's myrmidon who assails his potato patch. Progress! only everybody will share the powerful secrets, and none will fall below the mark but the wilfully indolent and the born idiots."

"Come, Baron, has it not taken over eighteen centuries to convince us we are not infallible? And will it not take as many again before we perceive that all human laws must be incomplete and imperfect?"

The other looked at her pityingly, and then said:

"No, not when each strives after his neighbour's happiness, and so achieves his own, unseeking it."

"All true love is unselfish: a girl throws herself away to gladden the man, regardless of the consequences to herself. Like the gentleman who had been unwittingly talking prose all his life, we women have been acting up to the golden rule of the Socialists and Materialists!"

The Baron felt a glow heretofore unexperienced. Aileen's novel beauty, the simple charm which characterised her manner, grew in fascination over

him. Never in his life before had his cold reserve thawed in the presence of a woman. His life had been too full of dreams in youth, too full of work in his manhood to allow of any soft feelings. Now, with this admiration, the Baron hesitated on the verge of the land of adventure, whence he might never return.

"Good-bye," said he again, almost falteringly.

"What will you take as a remembrance? Shall I sing you a farewell song?"

"No, give me that bunch of violets—you laid them on the piano not to be in your way. Thanks; they mean, if they mean anything, a promise of new life—spring after the long miserable winter!"

CHAPTER VII

A NARROW SQUEAK

"Delays have dangerous ends."—*King Henry VI.*

"I AM going to St. Nicholas', Marie, this morning, to see what the service is like."

"Please yourself, dear, only Maïda should accompany you."

So the girl set off for the church, her first visit, perhaps, to the handsomest of St. Petersburg places of worship. The gorgeous style of worship, the sumptuous dresses of the clergy, the rich incense and vocal music were all new to her. The jewelled and gilt pictures, before which groups of people knelt, were objects of marvel. Her eyes wandered from the brilliant robes of the officiators to the stalls where the tapers were sold, a proceeding which seemed irreligious to one not born in the pale. Motionless

amid the crowd, her gay spirit awed by the scene, she stood in a dimly lighted corner, listening to the fervent prayers around her, and enthralled by the exquisite music which filled the edifice. The gaudy decorations, the curious mingling of reverence and idolatry, as she took it to be, in the worship, were forgotten, and when the chief priest stepped forward with the crucifix to bestow the blessing and benediction, she also knelt down, the tears slowly trickling down her face. No more earnest prayer was delivered up in all that crowded building than the one of the little Protestant as she kneeled at the foot of a picture of the infant Jesus. As she rose and wiped her eyes, after a moment or two of silent devotion, a figure standing a few paces off arrested her attention. It was that of a gentleman of some slight acquaintance. He came towards her in manifest surprise.

"You here!" he exclaimed. "This is a strange sight to see a young foreigner worshipping after the Greek form."

"All prayers are the same, I presume, wherever they may be lifted up," she answered with a reproving smile.

"Though you have an attendant, will you do me

the honour to accept my escort homeward ?" he went on to inquire, with an earnest air, which even conceit would not have allowed her to interpret as springing from a sheer desire to have her society for a space. She acquiesced, and, indeed, they had not taken many steps together before she felt a small folded paper thrust into the slit between the button and the seam of her glove, with the dexterity of a professor of legerdemain, though the operator went on, with the most guileless countenance in the world, chattering commonplaces. But, somehow, she did not start with any idea that it was a *billet-doux*. She sustained her part of the conversation very poorly thereafter, and, from her impatience to read the communication, appeared tired and out of temper when she arrived at the mansion.

The Countess, at a glance at the dull face, recommended she should seek her room to rest. This the girl was only too willing to do. Alone, Aileen drew forth the letter, which ran as follows, in French, which we translate as cursively as it seemed written :

" Take heed how you move. It is rumoured that H. and I know the goal the car is driven towards, and he means to profit by the warning, at all events."

The "H." stood for the Countess, divined the reader, and she reasoned as accurately that the writer was the Baron.

"If the match is found alight, death will befall all near the train; but though extinguished that time, the powder may still be useful. I understand that S., a friend of V. (Vichili), is in town; pray do not attempt any tricks with him, as he will be too sharp for you, and take care not to let him know anything. If he should yet approach you (since all roads lead to Rome), let him talk on, but mark which way the wind blows. So long as there remains a drop of blood in my veins, so long will I obey my honour. Between ourselves, I think all will go well, and that we sh all surmount all obstacles—to great evils, powerful remedies, bear in mind, and those laugh best who laugh last. I do not say farewell, but fare thee well till our next meeting."

It may be remembered that two of the ablest leaders and workers for the patriotic cause had been taken prisoners, and, at his own request, the Baron had gone on a useless task: their quest, in the hope of finding out where they were imprisoned.

Whilst travelling, a scrap of paper, concealed in a

breakfast roll, had been given him at a hotel, informing him that Smaick, a colleague of Vichili, and a cleverer man, had been dispatched to St. Petersburg. Hence his warning to Miss Harford, whom he believed it judicious to make the instrument, least under observation, to spread the news by means of the Countess, to begin with.

With a proud feeling of satisfaction that the Baron had trusted her, mingled with her fear for his safety, not her own, Aileen scrupulously destroyed the letter, and then sat down to ponder.

From that moment she was one of the band, a novice who would yet be an acolyte of some prominence, inasmuch as she was too proud to remain long a subordinate in any act she played.

If only she could help him, she thought, as she reclined in her chair, with closed eyes and paling cheeks. The time of his return was uncertain, and the mission that he had gone on was of such a dangerous character that no one could tell how it would end. But all she could do at present was to acquaint the Countess with the warning and hold her peace.

Contrary to the expectations of many of his friends and colleagues, but altogether in accordance

with Aileen's prayers, the Baron returned safely to St. Petersburg, without any fruit rewarding his course. He had some premonition of dissension, or, at least, a ferment in the camp, for, after hurriedly, discussing his accumulated correspondence, he sallied forth to a meeting held at one of the *cafés*, the owner of which was affiliated to the order. Scarcely had he been ten minutes in the room before he found that a young man was monopolising the attention, and mostly the approval, by advocating the suppression, homicidically, of course, of one, Colonel Brisktl.

"Here, here!" the Baron broke in, sharply. "What is this I am to understand? That you, who call yourselves promoters of the scheme to benefit humanity, are advertising rank murder?"

"How about my sister? Was it not through the colonel's aid she was carried off, to become the prey of some noble? That is an act that puts him among wild beasts, whom it is the duty of any man to slay at sight. What is it to me that he is one of the tyrant's officers, and that I am a Nihilist? Reverse our positions, and I should thirst in the same way for his blood! You won't help me? Not one of you? and you, my lord, moreover, step betwixt me and the

doorway! Allegiance or no allegiance, once he has come to the town where I am, I am going to slay him."

"You shall not go forth from this room while I am in it on any such errand," was the stern reply; and as he spoke, the Baron strode to the door and turned the key. As he did so a murmur rose from the other men.

"You take on yourself great responsibilities. We have a right to have a voice in this matter as well as yourself," remonstrated another. "Apart from that crime, which is neither here nor there, this colonel is too daring, too clear-sighted; he must die."

With a frown the Baron faced his antagonist whilst replying curtly to the others.

"You have placed your minds and bodies at the disposal of the Committee," said he. "Obey! the enemy say the Committee strike quite frequently enough! As for our young brother, he is trying to wrest our cause into an excuse for private vengeance. The club of Hercules is to slay lions, not jackals. Let this colonel lay hands on one of us! Let him be the body-guard of the tyrant, and this youth, or whoever is deputed to cast the grenade, must fulfil his mission with what relish he

has. But his present intention is dishonouring the principles we fight for; it is making our efforts among the lower classes a bye-word for shameless self-interest."

The haughtiness in tone and manner roused the savage blood in his chief hearer. With a spring forward, he dashed past his less excited companions, and wrenched the Baron's hand from the latch. But even as his fingers touched him, a passion seldom seen on that cold, impassive face blazed up at the indignity offered, and without a word, he repelled the assailant so forcibly that he rolled under the massive table, right among the feet of such as had prudently remained unconcerned, and who now had the cruelty to spurn the insensible victim out unto the Baron's wrath again. Almost bestriding the prostrate form, he said, contemptuously: "If it were not that hitherto you have been a trusty worker among us, this revolt should not be passed over. But as it is, I dismiss this with a warning to you to be careful for the future. As for your poor sister, my boy, if your story be true, we shall ascertain the facts in the case and the name of the spoiler. If he be higher than Colonel Brisktl, no odds; we shall

punish him, and it depends upon your patient subservience alone whether you be trusted with the mission or not. Go, take a turn on the quays, and reflect on your oath to sink every concern to the grand cause of country."

"Well, I'll go," said the young man, still menacingly, as he rose and reached the opened door, "but I shall not forget that the nobles put the stain on my family."

A pause ensued.

"I do not know why we should be very hard upon immorality in the upper classes," remarked a grey-bearded man, emphatically. "Are we not striving by our materialistic views on religious matters to break down all faith in moral obligations?"

The Baron turned courteously to him, though he was only a labouring man, saying:

"There, my boy, you strike at once one of our hardest social problems. Has any revolutionary movement ever taken place whose avowed object is a people's welfare without half of its adherents being influenced by purely personal motives? Pure love of liberty and country, clear striving for mental and moral emancipation is not often found."

The other shook his head.

"Bad weapons in a good cause, but let us reprove the means when we have attained the ends. A pile of wood is a pile of wood, though the saw was rusty and the axe a stolen one. May I ask, Baron, did you succeed in your attempt?"

"No, I am sorry to say that both friends have been removed from Tiamen, and I could not trace them."

"Not from Moscow?"

"No."

"Then their fate is certain, for evidence of a grave character was found against them. They are doubling the detectives in various public resorts; and, have a care, *Gospodin*, if my eyes did not deceive me, there was a stranger in your room beneath who is too jovial to be guileless and too alert to be a friend."

The owner of the *café* turned pale.

"Baron Pointesky, I can say that the gentlemen have taken this room for cards, eh?"

"Certainly!" he held up his hand for attention. All were hushed. In the lobby was the sound of steps. Out of a drawer someone drew a pack of cards, which he slid noiselessly upon the table. The door opened.

"Adieu, gentlemen!" cried the Baron, in a light tone, without glancing round; "we have had a delightful game this evening, though I have not replenished my coffers."

The suspicious stranger entered. The life of danger most of his confederates led enabled the others to play their part in the same cool manner.

"Well, good-bye, Baron; you must have your revenge next time," cried out one, while, with a courteous bow in passing the sharp-eyed intruder, who murmured something about mistaking the room, the Baron withdrew. His quick wit had saved his friends from that worst of foes, suspicion. But as he passed out into the quiet street, and made his way to his solitary lodgings, his face lost its calm smile, and, in fact, looked worn and tired. The perpetual strain on mind and body told on him at times. One does not make omelettes without breaking eggs, it is true, but it is also hot for the frying pan.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MATE OF THE ENCAGED BIRD

"Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge."—*Titus Andronicus.*

"COUNTESS, I have sad news for you. Colonel Brisktl, whom I believe you know slightly, was found dead in his room this morning, and it is said poison has been administered. They have made several arrests, which may lead to information regarding it." Thus the young officer, Andrew Michilof, who continued in a lower voice and hurriedly: "Among them is Michael."

"Vera Sovna's lover! the student?"

"It is true, mademoiselle. I pity the young lady, but she as well as her betrothed have often given vent to sentiments which may or may not have been meant, but which have caused them to be arrested,

if not as accomplices, as sympathisers in the cause. Let us be thankful we have no friends dear to us who thus betray their disloyalty to their Emperor and imperil their own lives!" he concluded.

"Can I go to Vera?" asked Aileen, whose thoughts were with the poor orphan girl.

"Alas! no, as the young lady is under arrest; but any message I can manage to get conveyed to her shall arrive there to tell her of your loving sympathy."

He said it kindly enough.

"No, it may not be wise to write. If she can be spoken to, repeat simply that she is to trust for the best."

The young officer bowed low over the little hand, and after a few minutes' conversation, took his leave, leaving the ladies looking into each other's faces with pale lips and white cheeks. Who was the guilty one, and who had instigated the deed?

For some months two persons named Detrith and Demitri had been under scrutiny, and the sudden absence of the former had given a colouring to the report that his flight meant his guilt, and documents found in his cellar strengthened the surmise. These

young men, like many others fresh from colleges where positive philosophy and natural science were expounded, made a fierce onslaught against the religious views, held as a doctrine but scarcely accepted as a faith by the more educated classes of Russians. Büchner's "Force and Matter" had become a study for the youths and maidens instead of their Bibles, and the clergy's influence being nil in Russia, the movement spread rapidly. As a purely intellectual one, it was not to be despised; as a religious one, the consequences could scarcely be commended. The fundamental principle being absolute individualism, freedom from moral as well as political despotism was fought for. The lesson striven to be taught to the classes they would benefit was that emancipation of mind must follow emancipation of body, or, rather, the former must be the forerunner, if not twin-brother, of the other. To win freedom of press and of opinion without these were a hollow gain. The movement rose only to fall with disastrous effects on the founders. The ukase which in 1873 ordered all Russians under pain of outlawry to immediately return from Zürich, where a Socialist club had been

formed, recalled these young men, disciples of Karl Marx, Bacumin, Prudhomme, Fourier, and Owen. But at home they carried on the international propaganda with renewed vigour.

The Baron had watched, with a deeper peep into the future, these efforts to shake off the slavery of years. But he recognised that great truth which more zealous and less cautious agitators ignored, to wit, how privileges must be conceded to the people before any lasting results would spring from the movement; and he recognised the fact that, from a philanthropist's view, the movement needed much purification. Revenge for cruelty of every sort, moral as well as physical, actuated many who dared not complain openly of a corrupt ministry and an autocratic monarchy.

When news of Colonel Brisktl's death reached him he knew at once that the deed had been committed from a motive of revenge, doubtless by the young fellow whom he had but momentarily stayed. He shrank from the stain of bloodshed in a private grudge, though finding some palliation for an aggrieved brother's heated action. Still, all that apart, it was bitter to allow so many to be punished

wantonly for the crime, or act in individual justice if one.

In the first instance, there was Vera's lover Michael. This boy-lover must not be suffered to die without an effort to save him.

He knew that there was no medium : it was banishment or death. The Government were tired of their ceaseless watchfulness, and it was impossible, from the number of arrests, to give minute attention to the greatness or smallness of the guilt in each case. With kindly feeling, to spare the poor girl the sad news from a stranger, and an audacity which was almost genius, to counteract the opinion that he was a Revolutionist, the Baron went to Vera's house. Owing to his position in society and his influence, he was admitted. He knew well enough no word might be uttered that would not be heard. Slowly, with utter despair in her face, Vera came into the room.

"I guess why you have come," she said. "Thank you, but I have already heard that Michael is arrested under suspicion. He had no hand in this murder! I, who have loved him and read his heart these six years, feel that he would not have lifted

his hand against a fellow-creature. Poison administered! They must be mad who suggest such a monstrosity!"

The Baron bowed. He understood that this broken-hearted girl was speaking in this strain that some spy in an adjoining room might hear. But he also knew that her lover was doomed.

Treason was a fearful thing!

Already on the Czar's dressing-table proclamations and other papers of the Committee of Public Safety had been laid. Perhaps Vera immediately read the truth in his silence, for her white face turned even paler, and her lips trembled so she could not speak. Taking a cup of tea, which stood beside him, he offered it to her, touching her wrist, peculiarly as he did so, with one finger under cover of her own arm. It was a token of the League, of which, of course, the sign was understood. With a smile so sweet in its grateful patience that it touched him profoundly, the girl looked into his face, but it remained impassibly polite. Nevertheless, she was assured that Michael's sworn brothers would attempt his deliverance.

With faint hope imparted in her farewell clasp

of the hand, the Baron went away, her last words ringing in his ears: "If they banish him, I go also."

He reached his own house and private room, where, closing the door, he unlocked a secret safe in the wall containing papers. He tapped the wall for an answer that soon came. Before five minutes had elapsed, indeed, a sound in the passage attracted his attention. Rising, he opened the door, but had merely to take from the hands of an old woman who stood without a tray containing the diurnal roll and cup of coffee. When left alone, he cut open the little loaf, and, as he expected, a small strip of India paper fluttered down to his feet. On it was written in a clear female hand, in French: "A friend in need is a friend indeed. Can I be of any use?—A. H."

"Miss Harford, eh? Poor child," he said to himself, as he carefully dropped the paper into the coffee and let it dissolve to a pulp. Then drinking off the curious mixture he again tapped at the wall in another spot.

This time a heavier footstep echoed on the stairs, and a man, apparently a priest, entered.

"Father, thy name is Promptitude." The Baron

said: "Here are three silver roubles. Set off at once to Moscow, and remain there near our friends till the trial is over. Then let me know."

The man bowed and disappeared without uttering a word. With a half-drawn sigh the Baron threw himself into a chair and leant his head on his hands reflecting. First of all he would see the writer of those few words of comfort, and tell her how her friend had borne the shock of her lover's arrest. Possibly, Aileen might be useful as she wished. Here was the time to test her courage, anyhow. He rose and passed out of his room, meeting no one there or in the street, and was soon at the Countess Hevna's. Aileen was too unwell to appear; but both the Count and Countess were in the saloon. The latter rose, and with a bow retired to the boudoir to leave the two men at liberty to talk.

"This will cause much sorrow, Baron," said the old man, as he thoughtfully stroked his beard. "I hear that as many as two hundred people are arrested. Lebedwa is one."

"Yes; and, after all, it is a private revenge that has wrought this new evil. No orders were out for the colonel to be removed. Detrith, as you may re-

member, had a beautiful sister who won the admiration of a prince. Bah! you know the rest. It has ruined our cause for the present, I fear. Last year they said the trials of some of our best workers would prove the end of all, yet we survive. And it would seem that the dying breath from the pestiferous casemates of Fort St. Peter-and-Paul, and the drum-drowned speech of our martyrs on the scaffold: these are disseminated more extensively than we hoped. The tide, my lord, is rising again; it is a tide, and not merely a flood that advanced once only to recede and remain afar for ever. The Government is mad to withhold its consent to a constitution or the union of all political groups in the capital. But Government is temporarily stronger than the people."

"And always will be," returned the old man.

"Nay; out of extreme repression spring the band of brothers, friends, sons, whose dear ones must be avenged. Against autocracy the incorrigible terrorists. The one-man power is too ridiculous a thing in this age of education; and ridicule kills."

"Ah! well, Baron, we have hard times before us now if we may believe all we hear. But to change

the subject. Our little girl upstairs is not at all well. A headache, she says; a heartache, perhaps. Who can read a woman? though Marie believes that she has that more than human facility."

The Baron turned thoughtfully to the Countess, who entered at that moment.

"Will you give my respects to Mademoiselle Harford, and tell her that I hope next time I call I shall find her recovered from her indisposition. I am sorry our little friend is not visible this afternoon."

"I would send up to her, but when I peeped in a moment ago, she was sound asleep, so I think I had better not disturb her. I did think that young Michilof might have something to do with her headache; but the child, in spite of her careless way of talking, is very reserved. I do not quite understand her."

The Baron did not come for a couple of days again, during which no news came about Vera, and, whatever Aileen thought, the Countess determined to make an appeal at last to Sor Vichili for permission to see her.

"Ask him to come this evening," she said to Aileen, who was beginning to look wan and troubled.

As the wily woman guessed, the official came. He was met by Aileen with her usual gay nonsense. He chuckled at the idea of her utter innocence of serious proceedings. Not that he was a bad-hearted man, but his eagerness to shine in his profession doubtless hardened him against those he would otherwise have dealt more gently with. The Countess made her request very artfully at first, and then earnestly.

But Sor Vichili only shook his head.

"Till her lover's trial is over I can do nothing. Then you may have an interview with her."

"You are very kind," the girl said, as she smiled on the police agent. "I shall rely on your promise. Oh! politics are such dangerous things to meddle with—even the cleverest."

"And you are, therefore, wise to ignore them."

"Which means I am too wise to be foolish, or too foolish to be wise."

Sor Vichili looked roguishly at the girl as he drew a folded paper from his pocket. "You are a good French scholar, I understand, and so may perhaps interpret for me these sentences before I disclose them to those who will ascertain the writer."

Aileen took the slip and read the contents. The French was clear enough, but the meaning was mysterious. The words ran :

"We shall be successful yet. But if he pulls through, it will be wonderful, for his life hangs by a thread."

"Well ?" she inquired, with her provoking smile.

"I am the happy conveyer of this same billet, which I took from a messenger at the door."

For an instant a thrill of horror ran through the girl's veins, leaving her speechless. The Baron had chosen his messenger badly ; the man had stupidly or weakly handed over his trust to the police official. But without venturing a glance at the Countess or Sor Vichili, carelessly twirling the note between her fingers, she exclaimed, suddenly : "I know now, I know ! what a dull thing I am to have been puzzled for even an instant. But could you have imagined some hideous machination of which these lines are a clue ? Ha, ha ! Why, *Maria mia*, do you not remember ? The Baron promised us that we should go for a sleigh drive with him if the Tartar horse was properly broken in ; but it appears," and here Aileen gave a laugh worthy of any actress, "that the horse

has broken down! his life hangs by a thread! However, I hope he will pull through, and pull us through the snow, too. I am dying to go sledging!"

The Countess, who had sat, scarcely daring to move, while her friend was speaking, looked at the police agent. His face was smooth; but in spite of his contempt of the girl before him as a plotter, and though he could not bring himself to believe her clever enough or even discreet enough to be used as a go-between, he yet dwelt unconvinced. With an inspiration born of new fear for the Baron's life, Aileen made a bolder stroke.

"It is vexatious, but it cannot be helped. Perhaps, if you are passing the Baron's to-day, you would not mind saying I am much obliged for his message, but all the same disappointed."

And rising, with perfect calm, the girl tore the note in half and tossed the pieces carelessly into the basket for waste at the escritoire in crude gold and Ural crystals on to the table. The countenance of the police agent cleared as if by magic. He had been right then, after all, and this girl's solution of the seeming mystery the true one. At all events, he would be able to call at the Baron's under peculiarly

advantageous auspices, and hoped to make this valuable to his promotion. He became overwhelmingly gracious, and, putting his professional cares aside, paid ludicrous homage to the ladies. Meanwhile, Aileen was very uneasy. Supposing the Baron, thrown off his guard, should show his anxiety, or, worse still, disclaim the fact of possessing a troublesome steed. And then a half-laugh in spite of her fear came from her lips as she thought of her own readiness of invention. The Countess, who had known more of the consequences attending the finding of even such a simply worded note, did not so easily forget.

"Aileen," she said, as they sat alone that evening. "You frightened me nearly out of my senses when I saw you silently fumbling with that note. It was extremely foolish of the Baron sending such a one to you, considering that he is aware how many might have been suspected. One might fancy the man was in love to forget elementary caution."

She was so upset that our kind-hearted girl put her own sad thoughts aside and devoted herself to cheering her friend. "And yet," she said, as she stood alone in her own room that night, "she cannot

have suffered what I did, for she has no special inclination towards him, save as a chief of her party, whilst I, I am afraid, more than admire him—yes, I love him!"

It was late before she could even think of returning to rest. Throwing herself down in an easy-chair, the tears she had been repressing before her friend rolled down her cheeks. Her terror for the Baron's safety and longing to see him again had betrayed to herself her own true feelings regarding him. No word had passed his lips which could evidence any attachment for this girl who had so speedily called him "friend;" but Aileen had no thought of such a thing. To serve him, to love him in her heart as a woman only loves once in her life, was enough for her. She never imagined that this devotion must meet with a return, or that this masterly man would ever think of her warmly. Meanwhile, Sor Vichili had left the house and was proceeding towards the Baron's apartments. There he knocked. The task Aileen had set him was one he delighted in, for between the two men there existed a deep-rooted dislike, the animosity of opposite temperaments.

As he entered the room the Baron rose hastily, and, after a formal bow, motioned his visitor to a seat.

"It is not often that Sor Vichili can snatch a moment from his arduous duties to honour me with a visit."

"True, but I could not be so ungallant as to refuse to be the bearer of a message when asked by so charming a young lady as Mademoiselle Harford. Your note, Baron, charmingly written, by the way, was welcomed with that amusement which its contents warranted."

The police agent's broad face was expanding into a smile as he finished his speech, but, nevertheless, his sharp little eyes scanned his enemy's face closely.

"May I ask you," inquired the Baron, politely, "whether the young lady made you acquainted with the contents of my note first, or the contrary?"

"I took it from the messenger open," was the smooth reply, "and was not astonished when I heard the young lady's interpretation of what was terse enough. But, whoever enunciated the sentiment that he could hang any man on a line of his handwriting,

he was worthy to be a chief of the Political Criminal Department. I know magistrates who would have considered such a note as a very cautious, but still compromising one."

"Well, I am aware that you are vested with powers extraordinary during these trials for the purpose of collecting evidence regarding the Revolutionists; but the private correspondence of a gentleman to a lady surely ought to be respected."

There was no fear, only disdain, in the calm tones, as the Baron stood, his hand leaning on the table near where Sor Vichili sat. The police agent changed his tactics. "My dear sir, no offence was intended, as you will see when I give the lady's response. That can keep, however. By the way, how are you getting on with your new purchase, the wild Traktir — or Tartar horse, is it? I know a gentleman who wants to make up a trio. Are you disposed to sell him, as you cannot break him in?"

"My newest horse is sufficiently tamed," returned the Baron, perplexedly.

"Is he? ahem! After all, I did think the English

lady's interpretation of your note rather faulty," quickly remarked the police agent in a tone already exultant. "Perhaps you will give me the true explanation of this little epistle."

"Will you allow me to finish my remarks, Sor Vichili?" The Baron leaned forward with a smile, but contempt in his eyes. "I repeat my horse is tame enough, but the spirit of these Tartars—you know we Russians come from that country, too—is unconquerable. He is in the fetters now, but I doubt not, when he is free, he will behave to the admiration of the beholders. What's your wish? may I be there to see? If so, Amen!"

"This is all very well," faltered the other; "but—but why has the young lady wished me to tell you she was disappointed about it."

"For which I am truly sorry. I cannot tell. And now, my dear sir, may I remark that, if so slight a thing is to occupy the attention of a chief of police, the force will have to be trebled to keep account of all these dangerous letters."

Sor Vichili looked round viciously as he left the room, and muttered when safe without: "Perhaps your suggestion has already occurred to us."

"Poor child," was the Baron's first thought as the door closed on his unwelcome visitor. "That note of mine must have fallen into the hands of one of our new people. "The old story of the grain of sand which clogs a wheel of the Satrsburg clock and checks all the mechanism."

He turned then to combinations for the liberation of Vera's lover, but when the Russian police make arrests their hold is not easily relaxed. At all events, he procured Miss Harford the pass for her to call on her friend.

From the day poor Vera had heard of his arrest her health had declined. One gloomy winter afternoon Aileen set off to see the dying girl. The interview was one full of such pain that Aileen could hardly bear it; and yet Vera found relief in relating the episode of the arrest.

"It was here, in this house, it happened. We had friends, a few of them, as it was my birthday, and my darling came. I can see him now as he stood before me, the light falling full on his golden head and sunny eyes. Aileen, as I looked at him, I seemed to feel a weight on my heart, as if something was about to happen, and yet he was so happy! (like

you always are, my sweet one,) and he did not even fear suspicion. I was singing, when suddenly a message for him came in the name of a friend. Ah, wretches, they dared not accuse him openly! He went, and we waited till I could bear suspense no longer. Then I went down to find the door guarded, and I a prisoner."

"He may be liberated after all," said Aileen.

"Alas! I cannot hope it. You do not know what I do of our laws and trials. Men disappear here and are heard of no more, and inquiries are stopped at the commencement. Years afterwards, by a round-about way, an old woman learns that her lover perished, prematurely aged, in the lead or copper mines, or playing the dog of burden attached to a snow sledge. Ah, me!"

"But the Baron will do his best!" cried Aileen, enthusiastically.

"I may not believe in the best now." Then, as a burning blush rose to the other girl's cheek, the Russian continued: "It is the Baron whom you love, then? God grant that you be happier in your love than I have been. Nay, do not shrink from me. Only make him go away from this accursed country,

from which rise daily more groans than laughs, and on which fall tears that should suffice to cleanse it of wickedly spilt blood. I am not to be deceived—I am dying, Aileen, and they say the dying see more clearly sometimes into the future. He cannot succeed; the time has not come; better a flight to another land, yours—why not? and it will save you a broken heart."

"I cannot, Vera; I will not be the one to make him false to his convictions."

"Convictions! That is another word for death and exile. Aileen, listen: I have seen my mother die, I have heard my father condemned to lifelong banishment, and now I have lost all I had to cling to in this world. I do not regret my part, small as it has been, in aiding our cause, but I know that no one who embarks in it—can expect that home happiness which a woman desires. This suspicion creeps in between husband and wife, between servant and master, parent and child, and the shadow of a nameless terror never leaves our hearth."

"You are, I must think, too gloomy. Rather hope that we will get your brave love out of bondage and afar, even into England, where you can join him

and be happy. But can I not do aught for you, Vera?"

"No. Except pray that I may be able to bear what is before me."

"Now sit down beside me, so, with your head on my shoulder, and tell me what you will, so it comforts you."

The girl knelt down by the sofa where her friend reclined, and put her arms round her tenderly, pressing soft kisses on the hot white brow. The remembrance of these solemn hours was never effaced from her memory, and the lesson of patience and trust which the young and feeble girl taught her was not without its effect on her after life. The kindness of Sor Vichili, or the self-contained injunction in the formidable order-to-view the lady under private detention, prevented their being intruded upon. It would be too much to say they were not spied, since every Czar had blamed Peter the Great that he forgot to lay out all the capital as one Dionysian Ear! The heavy sorrow of the younger girl was relieved for the time being. Later on in the evening, Sor Vichili appeared, and himself handed her into the *drosk*, which was to convey

Aileen home; and when the girl, with red eyes and trembling voice, heartily thanked him for his consideration, he said with more feeling than he had displayed for years: "I wish I could prove my friendship. But unless you have an order from that eminent, almost august hand, you will probably not be admitted here again."

CHAPTER IX

A SLEDGE-DRIVE COURTSHIP

"Of all base passions fear is most accurs'd."

King Henry VI.

"Now, Baron, you really are a good friend! I see you have brought your sledge. The truth is, Aileen has been so dull lately that a ride will do her good. Mind you let her think it was your own idea. She positively refused to go with young Michilof unless I went also; but then, he is a young man, and slightly in love with her. I will tell her you will take no refusal."

The Countess left the Baron to himself. With genuine curiosity he raised a book of poetry which lay open, and in which passages were scored with pencil marks. He was still looking over the marked passages when the door opened, and Aileen came

softly in, her pale brunette complexion set off by a dainty costume of dark golden brown fur and velvet.

She thanked him for the promised sledge-drive and apologised for her delaying them. The servants were about, and they exchanged no further speech whilst the two went down the stairs to where the sledge was waiting. A minute more and they were speeding swiftly away over the white roads. Once outside the town, the Baron turned to his companion and said:

"I have not thanked you yet for the courage and wit you displayed at the finding of my unfortunate note. It is a service I cannot think of without wondering how a girl like you could show such wonderful presence of mind."

The bright face looked up from under the fur cap.

"You trusted me as your friend: could I, therefore, fail you?"

"Few people think so highly of friendship!" returned he. "But, tell me, what has been the matter with you? Headache, I was informed, that convenient excuse for every evil or trouble a woman suffers from."

But Aileen did not answer him.

"Is this not lovely, my first sledge-drive, do you know? I like whirling along at this rate. All sensations of rapidity are best to my taste, and all drawling, dawdling, dilatory movements and speech positively painful."

"You do not refer, I suppose, to love or religion," was the half-laughing reply.

"No; they are the two sentiments in our life that should never die; and yet they are the two which cause humanity the greatest suffering and perplexity."

Through the clear, cold air they whizzed, the sledge bells ringing out joyously, and finding their echo in the girl's heart. Presently she exclaimed:

"What is that scar on your wrist, which I perceive when your glove opens? I never noticed it before. How did you come by it, I say?"

"Wolves," was the laconic reply.

"Oh!" And, unable for a minute or so to speak, Aileen sat gazing at the rough, uneven scars which the Baron's struggles with his refractory steeds disclosed.

"It is nothing much," continued the man. "It was two years ago when I was in Siberia. I was helping a friend to leave the exhausted Treasury no

further demands for his board-bill, and as time was an object with us, we had to make all speed. I remember that night well, rather! It was moonlight, bitterly cold, and our way lay through a nasty piece of wood. Every tree and shrub shone out in full relief against a cloudless sky, a very lucky thing, as his limbs were galled by the fetters, and I had no desire to bark mine over the stumps if we had been thrown out of our sledge. I could not help admiring the solitary grandeur of the scene before me. Our horses were fresh, and we had plenty of firearms, so there was really no cause for fear. My companion, however, from hard usage in imprisonment, had lost his nerve and was in a state of intense terror lest we should be pursued. That was not my fear. Our passports were more than officially perfect, representing us as rich Frenchmen, and I knew we had distanced any pursuers who might set off in search. So I did my best to encourage K——: but, I am bound to say, with but little success. Looking back to that long silent night-ride now, I wonder at my own calmness; but all consciousness of outward danger seemed merged in one idea, to help this poor wretch to escape to liberty from hell upon earth. It

was about eleven o'clock, when, as we still hurried on, K—— suddenly uttered a cry of horror, and pointed to a hillock which lay on our right. I looked and saw what, after all, was but an ordinary occurrence in those parts, a pack of wolves rapidly following in our track. I knew my friend would not have the nerve to fire, so I gave the reins into his hands, and loading my repeating pistols leaned over the back to shoot the leaders as they came up. There were about twenty, I should say, altogether, large, gaunt, half-starved brutes. I picked off two as they bounded after the sledge, which gave us a moment's breathing time, as the others stopped to devour them. Wolves do eat wolves! The brutes soon caught us nearly up again. This time I killed five, and wounded one. Again they stopped while we tore onwards. But though I knew that there was no danger now of them gaining on us, I saw to my horror a new peril lay before us. My friend's hands were getting so benumbed with cold, that he could scarcely hold the reins. In fact, he had just strength to give one last jerk to hurry on the steaming horses when they fell from his grasp. I seized them in one hand, and as I did so a brute, the new

leader of the pack, snapped at my hand which held the pistol, and tore it as you see. I just gave him a blow on the head, which felled him, and then 'again we urged our wild career'—hem, Moore!—I mean, Byron! But danger was finally over, for not long after we came in sight of a *stanzia*. That is the history of my scarred wrist."

Throughout the narrative Aileen had sat motionless, with wide-open eyes and parted lips, and as the Baron finished he saw her face was deadly pale. She had realised all he spoke of. The great, lonely, snow-covered steppes, the vivid moonlight plains, the band of gaunt wolves, and the two men flying for bare life.

"Oh, it was horrible!" she said, with a shiver. "But if they had caught you."

"He would still have been safe, for I was pledged to the Society to rescue him. He would have been swept rapidly away in the sledge whilst I, leaping out, would have held the wild dogs at bay. Then, at all events, my motto was, a man can only die once in his life."

Receiving no comment, the Baron, after a moment, leaned round and looked into the averted face, pale

to the lips, and her downcast eyes were full of tears. Touched yet again at his companion's unconcealed interest in him, the man put out his hand and laid it on hers.

"Come, we will talk only of pleasant things: Moore's poetry, for example. Ha! 'Lalla Rookh' discussed in a sledge gliding over the snows of Russia is delicious for the contrast." At the first touch of his hand the girl started, but made no attempt to withdraw her own.

"Your hands must be frozen," she remarked, timidly, dwelling on the scar as though the hand so hurt was less likely to be strong for the future.

"Well, they are rather stiff," he answered, with a merry raillery. "But not cold."

Indeed, a glow from his grasp encircled her fingers like a ring of flame.

"But you have not answered my question," and he gave a sudden little pressure, which brought the colour back to her pale face again.

"I like it," she answered, hesitatingly; "that is, Tom Moore," with a laugh, remembering that these little attentions were currently reported as necessary concomitants of a sledge-ride between

lovers. "In all he says there is such a tone of perfect truth. I wish he had rhymed a sledge-drive!"

"Did he not? He must have experienced it in Canada. Yes, his sledgers' chorus would be a pretty pendant to his boat song!"

As Aileen alighted she turned on the steps, saying quickly:

"No running away, sir! In fact, the Countess bade me say that you must take tea with us. Somebody will hold the horses, or, better still, take them home."

She disappeared nimbly, and the Baron followed up the broad staircase to the Countess's boudoir, where she was awaiting their return.

"I hope you had a pleasant drive, Baron."

"Yes, I think we enjoyed it. It was a novelty to your companion. She tells me it is the first sledge-drive she has ever had."

At that moment Aileen came in. She had thrown off her heavy outdoor wraps with a celerity which a *change artiste* might have envied, and shone radiantly after the exhilarating drive in a soft black material, relieved by a yellow rose at her neck.

"Ah, one of your admirers' roses," cried the Countess, more or less maliciously, for the best of women take pleasure in shooting at lovers. "How pleased he will be. I told him when he called this afternoon you were out, and he seemed terribly disappointed."

"I do not wear the rose because he gave it, but simply because I like the colour with a black dress; so please say nothing about it or me to him," returned Aileen, sinking carelessly into the nearest easy-chair. "There, I feel tired again. It was so much excitement; the sledge bounds half on, half off the ground, like an express train capering upon the metals."

"Took you too far! I am afraid that is all my fault," said the Baron, handing her a cup of steaming drink.

"No, no; I do not blame you. You could not do less than gratify my desire to the utmost. What's that new sheet of music, Marie? Is this also a gift from my admirers?"

She spoke in a hard tone, and, rising, went over to the piano, where she sat down to try the tune.

"Evidently the words were chosen expressly for you," her friend called out, with a laugh.

Beyond a sharp, unwonted touch on the treble

chords, Aileen showed no emotion, and did not even stop when the Baron came after her to the alcove in which the grand stood.

"You are not quite correct in your time," he said, unkindly, for he must have guessed that his proximity put her out presently. "I happen to know, as I used often to hear a sister of mine sing it." Still no answer. But the man saw by the pettish shrug of the shoulders his companion was annoyed. Presently she twisted round.

"If you want me to be civil to you, sir, do not talk of this eternal Michilof. I am tired of hearing Marie hint he admires me, especially as he was wrapped up in love for his cousin before I came."

"So that is his offence—that he cared for some one else first. Do you think that any man reaches to the age of thirty without having known what love is?"

"I had no such idea; but what cannot be cured must be endured, and without raking it up again."

The Baron scanned her features narrowly before he said:

"Your words are not the interpreters of your thoughts. My one glance into Moore's poetry has told me better how they run."

"That does not follow," was the quick retort. "One may admire a sentiment as one does a picture, without its having any part in one's own dreams or hopes."

"Scarcely; no one carefully studies any subject unless there is a natural leaning towards it."

"Well, as I have no natural leaning towards either your Michilof or his presents, we will dismiss them from our conversation, and you shall sing to me——'

"From Moore?"

"Moore or less!"

"I do not know enough to prevent my selection being monotonous. You had better play and sing to me if you will."

It was a perilous time for any man, even as well governed as the Baron, to sit so near this youthful beauty, to watch the pliant figure, and listen to the sweet voice trilling out some of the sad love songs of his country. With a perceptible sigh that sprang from many causes, the Baron leaned back, softly stroking his moustache, while his eyes took in the winsome picture before him. It was one of home and happiness, which the man had not known since boyhood, and which came to him as an almost new experience. Not one that he coveted, but pleasant

all the same. When a man has given up his life for one idol, any lesser thing, whether of happiness or sorrow, that crosses his path is apt to strike him only as a play strikes the beholder. The Countess much admired her friend's musical powers, but was not fond of the art herself; so she went about the room arranging flowers in the various vases. With a sudden mischief in her face and eyes, Aileen brought her piece to a conclusion, and catching up a bunch of sweet-scented flowers which was not far off, tossed them upon the gentleman's knees.

"Marie, say good-bye to your choicest bunch."

"You naughty girl. But pray keep them, Baron; I have quite enough."

As the fragrant sprays fell on him, the Baron had looked up, a sudden inquiry in his eyes. Then carefully gathering up the creamy blossoms, with a light smile he lazily rose and went to Aileen's side.

"Do you give me these flowers," he asked, steadfastly regarding the shrinking figure as, half frightened at her own temerity, she leaned against the wall.

"If you care for a gift that is *thrown* at you; but they are Marie's flowers, not mine. You heard what she said."

"Do *you* give them me?" he persisted.

Glancing round like a hunted deer, Aileen saw the Countess vanishing in the saloon beyond. The Baron perceived her dismay, but his usual gallantry made no effort to help her out of it.

"Well," he said, "I am waiting for the answer."

"Wait on, then," she said, desperately. But no sooner were the words out of her mouth than she repented them, for the Baron took her at her word. He fell into the position of a soldier standing at ease with grounded arms, with such a promise of imperturbable patience common to Russians of all degrees, that her defiance and provokingness oozed away, and he saw the colour mounting higher and higher till her face resembled a full-blown rose.

"Let me have them over again, and nicely this time," pleaded he.

He held out his hand, and she grasped at the stalks; but in an instant his hand closed on hers for the second time that day. He remarked, with a pretended gravity that chilled her completely:

"Let this be a warning to you not to pelt a gentleman with flowers even when he is a friend."

"Why not?" So faintly were the words spoken that the man could hardly hear them.

"Because," he replied, "pelted with roses, he might return the compliment with orange blossoms."

CHAPTER X

WHO SHALL WARN HIM?

"Affairs that walk (as they say spirits do) at midnight have in them a wilder nature than the business that seeks dispatch by day."—*King Henry VIII.*

ONCE out of sight of the girl who cast a spell over him by her fascinating wilfulness, the Baron's aspect changed. At his rooms he knew that tidings must be awaiting him that might sooner be sad than gleeful. Indeed, the trial of the young student prisoner had taken place, and severe though the examination was, no fresh news regarding the murder of the colonel had been discovered. But a printing press had been found in the adjoining premises to the prisoner's lodgings, and the remains of some blackened papers. What did it mean? The stubborn resistance of all three captured Revolutionists aroused the indignation of their judges. Private

means were taken to see whether bodily pain would induce the wretched victims to speak. But the spirit was stronger than the flesh, and the most scientific application of electricity, which the Inquisition's most skilled torturers may turn in their graves with regret not to have known, was a failure.

When the tortured body gave way, even in the short struggle which preceded death, this young student uttered no word. He met his death in the proud consciousness that a pardon purchased by the blood of friends was not worth the taking. If his spirit shrank at all, it was at the remembrance of the sweet girl who lay dying because he suffered. Her message to him had been one worthy of the loving heart that sent it. "Tell him that we shall not long be separated. That the hour in which he breathes his last will be mine also. I can regret nothing now. Better the agony we both have suffered than the scorn which must have followed his release on conditions. We shall be together before long."

In fact, spite of loving words and tender comfort, the soul of the broken-hearted girl drifted away, leaving Aileen almost stunned by her grief.

As the Baron raised the black-edged letter he

knew the worst. Vera was dead. And all this had arisen from that murder which brave men condemned. That the motive had no good in it he realised by the means thus taken. Poison! Could lasting good come of internal warfare, one of whose arsenals was the laboratory of Sainte-Croix?

With a sigh the Baron laid down the letter. His efforts had been vain, and the young fellow, almost boy he had seen grow up to manhood, had died a fearful death. Verily there was much to dishearten and sadden in this struggle for freedom.

Some four months afterwards Aileen was invited with the Countess and Count to the great ball of the season. In spite of the gloom which overshadowed her horizon, our heroine could not refrain from a feeling of gratification as she entered the beautifully decorated room and saw herself reflected in the long glasses which hung round. It was now nearly two years since she had come to Russia, and something of the joyous innocence of the freeborn youth had gone from her. Not that she was unhappy; but it is impossible for anyone to mix unconcerned with the world, to stand face to face with its responsibilities, to look on at the struggle

of fellow-beings in the race of life, or witness, far sadder sight, the terrible efforts of a country to throw off the slavery of years. Aileen had been an interested spectator of the uprising before her. She had felt its sadness insomuch it had touched and by its touch killed her dearest friend. And though she scarcely would own it to herself, a friend whose dearness to her she strove not to own was still engaged in it. So though the grey eyes were as bright, a close observer would have noticed that there was a wistfulness in their graver glances not there six months before, and the pretty pouting lips had a droop which habitual repression had deepened. Even as she stood at present talking beside her old admirer, Michilof, her whole tone seemed less sprightly, and the brilliant sallies which had once been so great a charm in her issued with a forced gaiety.

"Has the Baron arrived yet?" she asked, somewhat impatiently, in a lower voice of the Countess, who was passing her.

"No; and his absence alarms me."

But even as she spoke her companion saw the tall figure of the man she loved enter the room, and saunter slowly through the crowd, answering off-

handedly the greetings of his friends and acquaintances. He was evidently in a quiet way looking for some one, and Aileen felt a throb of hope as she realised it was she. Motionless she waited his coming, though apparently engaged in fastening a refractory button on her glove. The Baron came up with a sincere cordiality.

"Not dancing? How is that?"

With shyness the girl held out her hand.

"I have been dancing only a minute ago."

The Baron pressed the hand as he transferred it to his arm, and proposed they should find some quiet spot where they could talk without being overheard. Only too happy to assent to any wish of his, Aileen led the way into a small alcove, almost hidden in festoons of flowers, and sat herself down in a corner of the seat, leaning her head against the crimson-draped wall. The Baron paused for an instant to survey the animated picture, then seated himself beside her, leaning forward slightly so as to command a view of her face.

"How long is it since we saw each other?"

"Three weeks, or thereabouts; I will not be quite certain."

"It has seemed three months to me," he said.

The girl's heart gave a great throb, which was suddenly stilled by his next words.

"At the risk of appearing as a spectre of evil at your banquet, I must tell you that your admirer Andrew Michilof is formally engaged to his cousin. He confided to me, poor fellow, the other evening that you had given him such a severe rebuff when he ventured to speak of his love, that he resolved to banish you from his thoughts."

"But, indeed, I was as kind as I could be. It was quite impossible I could marry him," exclaimed Aileen, in a distressed tone.

"Nay, I will not be your father confessor; it would not be fair. Let us choose some pleasanter topic."

With the knowledge of his own folly in thus remaining with a woman he loved, and yet felt in honour he should not tell of his love, the Baron dallied with temptation. No word which could reveal his secret he determined should pass his lips; but it was otherwise with his manner. It softened as he began telling her of his early life, and speaking of his researches and pleasure in many a learned

science before he had given up all for his country's sake. And in his presence the girl was happy. Nestling down in her seat, she drank in each low-spoken word, telling in return of her own happy young life and bright dreams. Only, his record was better; it was one patient watching and unselfish hope for others. The Baron was no egotist, and, besides, was of a peculiarly reserved nature; but there is no man living who can fail to reciprocate with, perhaps, after all harmless confidence, the true sympathy of a young and hero-worshipping maid. So they sat there in inter-communication till a persistent partner appeared and carried off the young lady. Secretly in her heart she regretted she was not miles away; but yet, with the deceit acquired in society, she glided smilingly away to the supper room. The Baron sought his hostess.

"Can I have a bed here this night?" inquired he.

Russian mansions are so large, that there was nothing remarkable in the request. Sometimes many guests remain at a town house into the following day when there are sound reasons for not venturing into the streets.

"I am dreadfully tired, and not very disposed to

go out again. I am getting an old man, you see," he added, with a smile that had a tinge of truthful melancholy in it.

"No wonder, if you take young ladies out sledging! I have heard of your charioteering, Baron; fie! Sor Vichili was much vexed at it. I believe he is fond of the little English girl himself. Still, how undeniably pretty the dear child does look! I am so sorry she refused Michilof; we ought to keep such desirable ornaments to society at the capital."

"Did he propose, then?"

"Yes, a week ago. I wonder she did not tell you as you are such friends. But as to staying here this night, Baron, why we shall be delighted; you know you are always welcome."

"Thus housed, I shall baffle the sleuth-hounds," muttered Pointesky, "and poor Sor Vichili there at the head of them."

Vichili was visible, and ruefully, if not anxiously, looking round the room.

Where had his partner, Miss Harford, disappeared? Supper was over, and though thereby disposed not to be captious, the *Pristav* did not care to be ignored by one of the prettiest girls in the room. A rather

sulky expression was beginning to come on his fat face when a light tap on the shoulder made him turn round.

There stood the delinquent, an arch smile on her merry face.

"So, Sor Vichili, I have to come and hunt for you. Now, that is not gallant. Nay!" as her astounded companion began an account of his fruitless search, "I will hear no excuses, for the polka has commenced."

With her brows bent in pretended anger, Aileen was not to be resisted. The mollified Vichili bore her off, resolving, though, that certain questions should be put to his charming partner before they parted.

"So Baron Pointesky has returned from his little trip?" he began, at the earliest opportunity.

"His little trip? Has he been away, then? You must be mistaken, Sor Vichili," exclaimed Aileen, with an air of surprise, stopping short and regarding the fat little man.

"Can it be possible that you, his friend, did not know that he has just returned from a three days' journey?"

"No; indeed, it is sometimes a fortnight between his visits. Where has he been? I must ask him all about it. Why, is it a secret?" as the police agent held up his finger, warningly. "Oh, do tell me all about it! Anyone would conclude, from your manner, that he was one of those horrid Revolutionists. Queer country, dear Sor Vichili; in ours the typical revolutionist wears such shocking bad hats, and tattered unmentionables, and unpresentable coats! Here, you will get me to believe in a while that he figures in the best society quite in the latest Paris fashion. If you tell me that he is a wicked ogre of Socialism, I shall have to refuse to see him any more."

She lowered her voice as she spoke, and looked up, with a half-frightened air.

"Nay, my dear young lady, pray do not alarm yourself. The police of His Majesty's capital are not likely to let anyone hurt you."

The slight stress on the last word did not seem to reassure the girl.

"I declare I will not go near him again till he has explained his absence. Because, we know, he has no country estates."

"True, but he may have friends there," replied the

man, who conjectured that this girl was no admirer now of the conspirators, for whose sake her friend Vera and her lover had died.

"We must never judge hardly of anyone. And perhaps it would be better not to mention again what I have told you. I do not wish him or anybody in any society to imagine that I am a tittle-tattler. I have my duty to fulfil, but," with the most lofty aspect he could don, "a police official may perform his duty and yet not be the spy, eh, eh?"

"Dear me, he would never think that," replied Aileen, with a laugh; "but, see, the guests are going, and it is twelve o'clock. Adieu, dear Sor Vichili, and pleasant dreams be with you."

"That can only be if they are of you;" and the gallant little man gave a bow which would have delighted a French dancing-master while Aileen tripped off. After a few parting words to some of her more intimate acquaintances, she went up the wide staircase and passed out on to a stone balcony just above the Count's seldom-used library. Here, tired and, in truth, slightly cross that there had been no glimpse of the Baron in her retreat from the ball-room, for the two, the Countess and herself, were to

stay at the house, she sat down in the corner and gave herself up to a reverie. Without exactly knowing why, she was disturbed at her partner's last question. The Baron was closely watched.

"Ah, my love, my love!" she whispered to herself, "how can I help caring for you when I reflect how noble and unselfish you are. You will never know how much I love you; but, oh, I would rather be your 'friend' than the wife of any other man in the world."

Had Sor Vichili any particular reason in thus inquiring into the Baron's movements? Her feeling that something was wrong had led her to assume a fear of the word "Revolutionist" she was far from feeling; but another motive spurred her: if she were considered incapable of conducting or engaging in a plot, so much the better; for then she might more readily assist the plotter if he should ever be in a position to need assistance from her. Her heart leaped for joy as her thoughts flew back to this evening, and she reflected that he had treated her with a confidence which he would never have given had he deemed her unworthy of it. Without one pang of even wounded vanity she had heard the news

of Andrew Michilof's re-engagement to his cousin, a pretty brunette. Every thought and every hope of her own future had died away, absorbed in this steadfast admiration of her heart's hero. It is such women who suffer in this world beyond words, and are the most unselfish, for Aileen realised perfectly that, even if the Baron loved her, this passion would only be second to that which filled his heart for his country. And in this self-resignation to a deeper, purer love the girl showed herself superior. The petty jealousy of a narrow-minded woman whose interests are bounded by her family circle was unknown to our heroine, whose young eyes had learned to see that the love which embraces all suffering humanity is the noblest of all earthly passions. As she sat pondering over these things, now grown familiar to her, the sound of hushed voices aroused her. Slipping cautiously from her seat, she crouched down to catch the words unseen.

The speakers were Sor Vichili and his friend and colleague, the clever Smaick; their subject the Baron.

"You are sure," she heard the former say, "that these papers refer to him?"

"Decidedly. They are documents forwarded for his perusal, and implicate him to a great extent. I always suspected the man in spite of his reticence on political subjects."

"You should have suspected him for that very reason," broke in the other, with a chuckle. "He who is not for us is against us. I have trapped more malignants who were accounted neutrals up to their arrest than any other sort. Go on."

"I want a word with you regarding this Mees Harford. I hear that she is a friend of his. She may be a tool. Have you noted her actions at all?"

Sor Vichili must have looked at his companion too much amazed to speak, for there was a silence for a minute or so. At last he said, with a tinge of amusement in his voice: "My dear Smaick, if you had talked as often as I have to that charming young creature you would never suspect her of hatching plots. She is the most dangerous person for anyone to confide a secret to that I know, for it would be revealed either from fright or love of chattering. Rest assured that she is perfectly ignorant of anything not 'straight' in which our bronze-statue Baron may be engaged."

"Still, I must have a talk with her," was the quiet, determined reply, which showed that the emissary had private instructions, which overrode his colleague's authority.

"Certainly, my dear friend, nothing easier; but are the orders out to arrest the Baron?"

"Yes; to-morrow, when he arrives at his rooms, officers will be there to arrest him. It would have been done to-night, only, as it happens, he is such an old wolf as to have scented the trap in his lair. He sleeps here; an arrest would raise a noise, and my orders are to do it quietly. But we watch his rooms to-night, so that no one can enter without being observed, and if anyone did, and disturb us investigating his papers at such a late hour, we should know it would be a friend or an accessory."

Here the great bells of St. Petersburg rang out the hour.

"One o'clock, and the guests are nearly all gone. Smaick, it is time to be about."

Aileen waited till the voices had died away in the distance, and then, with terror and dismay at her heart, crept along the balcony to the Countess's room. The weary woman looked up astonished at her visitor's

ashen face. With scarcely power to speak, Aileen knelt down beside her friend and hid her face in her lap. "My child, what is the matter? You terrify me!"

Brokenly the girl told her tale, and the Countess, who had listened in almost breathless attention, burst into a passion of tears.

"I have feared this all along. Oh, Aileen, what can we do?" Then, as the girl sat stunned, she continued: "We can go to the Count and ask him to send a note. But, no; you say the room is watched. What can be done? He might make his escape from the window. Ah, Aileen, it seems terrible to have to sit with idle hands, and a man in danger."

With a vivid flush on her face, the poor girl rose to her feet. "I must save him! His room is next to mine. I have but to turn the lock, and then I am there."

The Countess stared aghast. "Aileen, think what you are saying! What you propose is madness. If they should hear your voices, child; child, your reputation would go."

"But the Baron's is the last room, and the lady next me would not hear across mine; and the corridor

is too wide for voices to be heard unless the spies were to listen at the keyhole, which they dare not do for fear of arousing suspicion."

"It must not be. I will not allow it. By such an act you are placing yourself in the power of the Baron; and, child, though you may not know it, I guess this man loves you. He might make your imprudence a weapon against you if you dared refuse his addresses."

"Marie, I will not hear another word. You are his friend, and yet you can accuse him of what would stamp him as mean and ignoble. I care not what the world might think! The life of a brave man is at stake, and yet such scruples born of a worldly fear are to be allowed to leave him to his fate." The indignant eyes and flushing cheeks made the Countess feel somewhat ashamed as she answered: "Write to him if you will, and slip it under the door."

"And suppose he did not perceive the note, it would remain till morning, when escape would be too late, and ruin me too; not that that would matter then!"

"Do your will, Aileen, since nothing I can urge

will keep you from this fatal step! Only, put no blame on me if it should come to be known."

The Countess turned away as if to end the conversation. But Aileen had not finished, and she could not bear to part with her old friend in anger.

"Nay, Marie, you must listen to me. Do you think that what I have proposed has no painful side for me too? Do you imagine that I could take such a step of my own free will if I were not driven to it by the knowledge of a life at stake? You said you believed he loved me, Marie; can I, then, be the one to leave him, perhaps, to die? You are angry with me; yet I would brave the anger of the whole world, the scorn of those whose opinion I value most, rather than, through my short-coming, one hair of his head be touched. If anything happens to him, it will break my heart! if he dies, it will kill me."

Low as she had spoken, the intense pathos in her voice went to her friend's heart.

"My darling, I will not keep you. Go, and Heaven help you both."

The girl hastened back to her room, and then, with a passionate prayer that this man she loved might not only be saved, but by her means, she waited for

all the guests who still remained below to retire. Half-an-hour passed by, and then over the whole house there lay that profound hush which seems to come with the midnight hours. As the time arrived for her part to be played, Aileen's heart sank, and nothing less than this thought, terrible in its acuteness, could nerve her to do this deed. The Baron must be saved at any cost. Had she loved this man so long to shrink from any means of saving his life? Yet the hot blush rose to neck and brow as she estimated the task she had set herself. Her woman's fear of doing an unmaidenly act in the very eyes of her hero made her hesitate more than once as she looked towards the locked door which lay between them. There was one way of escape, through the window; would he avail himself of it? With tear-dimmed eyes, the girl sprang from her chair, when the clock suddenly rang out the hour of two. That sound brought her back to the full reality of her position, and, with a last prayer for guidance, she went towards the door. A moment still she paused, her fingers refusing to obey her will; then, with a supreme effort, she turned the lock, and as the door swung back on its hinges stood within her lover's room.

CHAPTER XI

LOVE WILL MAKE ITS WAY

"Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's!"

King Henry VIII.

After the Baron had retired to his rooms he carefully closed the outer door, and then threw himself moodily into a chair. Fresh plans and new resolves for the morrow passed through his mind. No written records could he dare keep to refresh his memory, for any day or even hour it was possible that he might be subjected, his person and his rooms, to a search. Suddenly the click of a door-handle aroused him. On his guard against spies, the Baron turned hastily, and there, to his stupefaction, in her full evening dress, stood the girl he had but recently parted from. With a red glow mounting to his forehead, he stepped back. Then as

with a slow step she came towards the light with drooping head, he pushed forward a chair, and standing erect with folded arms awaited an explanation. But with the instinct of a gentleman, he expressed no surprise at the fact of a lady thus visiting him alone at midnight. For he knew by the first glance at the white face that nothing but the direst necessity had driven his visitor into this equivocal position. And with the knowledge he had beside of her character, he read the unselfish feeling that made her thus bold. Strangely had she crept into his very heart already. He who had hitherto had no other thought but that of his country's welfare now was the victim of a fiercer love, and, what was strangest of all, for a foreigner. With the knowledge that it would mar her life to link it with his, perhaps cost her her life, he had refrained from telling her of his love. With this determination fresh in his mind he stood silent. But no words came. A dry choking seemed to prevent the girl from uttering the terrible words. The Baron broke the silence.

"This is imprudent of you, mademoiselle. Suppose anyone should know of this. I could have met you

anywhere else you desired, and listened to whatever you may have to communicate to me. Is it very serious?" His voice sounded cold to his companion, who could not read the fierce tempest which her presence caused to rage within.

With an effort she whispered, as she almost clung to the handle of the door: "It would not be safe elsewhere. I heard them, Sor Vichili and another, the police! only a few minutes ago, talking of you; they said you would be arrested to-morrow when you reached your rooms! You must fly at once."

A glow of admiration for the woman who could sink her own fear of detection for his sake mingled with his pain that the hour had come so long expected. Undone at last by some paltry act after years of safety!

"Do you hear? you must fly at once! I can give you money, if that's your need, for I have received, so timely, a draft that is payable at sight. I can give you letters to some friends at Paris. And I will take charge of anything you value that you must leave behind."

The Baron turned to her: "No, I will not fly. Have you an idea what is said of the lost leader?

that he lodged the contributions abroad so that he can live like a prince at Nice in a luxuriant villa in the eternal sunshine whilst his dupes rot underground or amid the everlasting snows? None shall say I feared to meet my fate, be it what it may, on my native soil. They may even destroy my bones with quicklime, disperse them to the winds, but, like calumny's mud, some will stick! and from the atoms some blood-red flower of reprisal will spring—the badge of the champion who will be successful!"

A haughty light shone in his eyes as he spoke, a light that faded to one of sorrow as he saw the girl who had dared so much for him fall fainting against the door. At sight of her as she stood thus, passion got the better of his self-control. Hastily striding forward, he threw his arms round her.

"Oh!" he cried, "do you know what this means to me? Do you know I adore you! that I have longed again and again to take you in my arms as I hold you now, and dared not! No love of the senses —no tender arms, no kisses to come, as a solace in all my weariness! And yet, that night when we parted a few days ago, would you have repelled me if I had told you what you were to me?"

His fervent words recalled the fainting girl to her senses.

"Fly while there is time! Do not think of me."

She pushed his arms away.

"No, never! My flight would mean treachery to my brothers. My terror would paralyse others. They may put me to death; but they shall never say that I am false to my convictions."

The girl stood in agony too great for words. Scarcely daring to look at her, the Baron continued: "I have known for some time that there was imminent danger? This blow has not come unexpectedly. My arrest can lead to no harm as regards others, and in taking me the authorities may not think it necessary to seek much further. Only it would have been better if this had happened six months ago."

"Why?" She came swiftly forward and confronted him. The man respected her; but his quick breathing showed how deeply he was moved.

"I would have died as I have lived, feeling that no heart had a right to love or mourn my death."

"Death, not death! Nothing can be proved against you, you say! It will not mean that," was the answer. "Only exile, and what of that, a few

years. We are young enough to wait till you return——"

"As if there were return from a Russian exile? At all events, the work will go on in other hands, perhaps stronger than mine; there are others who can carry it on."

He spoke calmly, as if the passionate utterances of a moment before had never been. Her concluding words seemed like a giving-up of whatever love she may have felt for him. It made the leave-taking less hard, for she would not suffer. Better so, that he alone should rue their meeting. What right had he to have spoken as he had in a moment of weakness?

With a hasty step he turned to the table and commenced putting his papers together. The girl had noted the change that had passed over his face, and her woman's instinct told her that the Baron had now spoken for the last time of aught that bore reference to his feelings for her. Looking at him as he appeared again, calm and cold, brave in the face of the danger and death that menaced him, her heart went out to him with a love that broke down any barriers that might still part them.

"Have you no word for me?" she said, her voice sounding strangely to herself.

The Baron bit his lip to prevent any rash word betraying him, and then, with his hand resting on the papers which he was sorting, turned to her.

"Yes; more than I have time to say. First, let me ask your pardon for uttering words I had no right to offer. I will not insult you by telling you to forget our friendship, because I know you too well to believe it possible; but let the remembrance be unmixed with any regret that my public career of work has been cut short. The sword has fallen. Here are several notes which might be magnified into something against several fellow-workers. I cannot burn them, as the ashes might betray me. Will you take them and destroy them at your leisure? And now I will bid you farewell, as we may not meet again. You can understand that, as a man of honour, I will not fly uselessly from my enemies."

"Yes, I understand; and now I would be the last to bid you go. You are right. It is no question of individual safety, but the welfare of many."

The words, calm in their resignation, with which the Baron had pictured his future, seemed a frightful

mockery to Aileen. She paused in her slow, almost dragging walk to the door, the brave words only lighting up for an instant the chilled heart. Then as her eyes met his, with a moan of unutterable anguish, she sank down on her knees, hiding her face in her hands. The Baron had watched her as she had thus parted from him without even a "God help you!" with a pain nearly as intense as her own; but his stronger will kept him silent. At this pitiful, wordless woe, though, he could resist no longer, crossing the room, he bent down, and unloosing the clenched hands, he raised them to his neck, and drew the wretched girl into his arms, saying in Russian, "Have I been cruel to thee?"

"Cruel, ah! Ivan, you have nearly broken my heart. Do you think that exile or death can alter one iota of my love for you? When I said that we could wait, I meant that when you came forth a free man you would find me unchanged, ready to give up the whole world to share your future, however dark it be. And, ah! Ivan, if worse befell you, I would still be true to you, true to your memory in life or death!"

During her speech, broken as it was by her emotion,

the Baron had stood with bent head, calm and still; but at her concluding words he raised it, and looked down into her eyes with a long, steady, searching gaze. Then he clasped her closer to him, and as he felt the hurried throb of her heart against his he forgot all in this delicious realisation of his life's latest dream. Passionately again and again he kissed the upturned lips, and it was not till a sudden recollection of her old fear that he should be endangering his life by delay smote Aileen that she drew herself from his embrace.

"I shall see you, to-morrow, my darling," she said, tenderly; "you shall go from this house proudly, openly, with my hand-clasp for the last."

As the door closed on his strange visitor, Pointesky laid his head down on the table with a deep-drawn breath that told what suffering he had just experienced. The weighty bitterness of this sudden downfall to his plans crushed him. After having avoided all that might compromise him, this overthrow must have come from one of those he was striving to serve. Scarcely a harder rub from the blind goddess could have affected him. And yet this misfortune had given him the love he yearned for, had come to

console him in his darkest hour! But to a man like Ivan Pointesky his country must ever be first. Profoundly as he loved Aileen, a passion the deeper because he had hitherto cared little for women, still deeper in his heart lay that love of country and his fellow-men which made such patriots as Kosciuszko, Bolivar, and Garibaldi, ready to give up all for country's sake.

With a rapid passing-over of his affairs in his mind, the Baron began to think of his defence. He guessed any papers which had fallen into Vichili's hands bore reference only to an attempted rescue of Vera's lover, one failing from the young man's removal from one prison to another. The authorities guessed that, unless quick measures were taken to obtain a confession as to other conspirators against the Government, he would escape. But Michael, gay, careless-hearted, often impudent in speech as he was, would have scorned to betray a friend, and so torture was tried in vain! And so with others. A grim, scornful smile crossed the Baron's lips as he realised that such a treatment might be his, and such a death! Rapidly making his morning toilet, he descended to the breakfast room, where the *samovar*

was hissing on the table before those guests who had remained the night before. As is the case with Russian breakfasts, no guest or member of the family need remain at the board when their meal is finished, and, therefore, the only two occupants at it were the detective Smaick and Countess Hevna. After a few words of greeting, the Baron sat down to the farce of eating a meal for which he had no inclination. Aileen, who had sought the Countess early to tell her of her adventure, was talking to Sor Vichili and their host. The night's vigil of prayer and weeping did not seem to have affected her. The fever of her restless spirit was shining in the brilliant eyes and on the flushed cheeks.

"Balls agree with you," said Sor Vichili, as he gazed at her animated face.

"Yes; and that of last night was the best I have known. I danced away my appetite, you see, though."

The chief of police answered with a joke, which filled the girl with repulsion. Meanwhile, the Baron and Smaick were mentally taking notes of each other though apparently engaged in the harmless occupation of eating. Presently Smaick leaned back in his chair as Ai'een advanced with the reproach:

"You idle things! Here have I been down this hour, Marie. I am ashamed at you. But may I beg for another cup of coffee? I am so thirsty. Thank you, I mean to go for practice on the Pleyel till we start. There seem to be Erards everywhere else we go."

With a smile of which only one there knew the meaning, the poor girl, whose whole frame was shaking with suppressed excitement, left the room. The Countess, who knew more than another of the wheels within wheels which were ever quivering into movement beneath the touch of a timid Government, could not say much to comfort her *protégée*. Her whole trust lay in the perfect self-control and caution of the Baron, and the ambiguous terms in which the letter to Aileen had been couched.

After a few words of conversation with his adversary, in which even the keen Smaick was forced to admire him, the latter turned to his hostess.

"I have to write one or two letters, so must leave you; therefore, I ask you to excuse me. I shall see you before taking my departure." Smaick glanced at Vichili, a glance not lost by the keen eyes of the Baron, whose indignation at the plot against him,

only waiting an hour to be played out, rose almost beyond the power of endurance. He went up to his room, wrote a few lines, such as anyone might read, to an intimate, affixing his full name, a sign that danger threatened him, and then went in search of Aileen. She was alone, standing silently in the bay window of the sitting-room, and did not turn at his approach. The Baron's first words caused her to shiver in uncontrollable agony.

"Aileen, I have come to say good-bye to you in private before we utter the last formal words below."

At the announcement the self-control which the poor girl had striven the whole morning to exercise gave way, and as he drew her to him she threw her arms round his neck and clung to him.

"Ivan, Ivan, if they will, let me go with you. I have plenty of money, and then we shall be together. Anywhere, so we are together!" The man looked down into the face white and drawn with suffering. "No, the purse of Fortunatus would not resist the rapacity of our gaolers. If they are merciful—what a word!—if they are merciful and banish me, you must promise to return to England. I shall have at least the comfort of knowing you are safe."

"Never, Ivan; I will be patient; but I cannot obey you in this. Listen!" and a ray of divine love lighted up her eyes, "I cannot go with you, but I will follow you! Up to now I had wondered at wives following their beloved to Siberia. It is no longer a wonder to me now."

"Not if I forbid you. Aileen, my child," he added, tenderly kissing her, "you will not disregard my last wish, for we may never meet again. Give me your promise to return to your own country, and let this miserable incident be forgotten."

"Forgotten!"

"Yes, you are young, and it shall not be my fate to wreck your life. Keep me in your heart as your friend; and, in years to come, give your love to one who will love, protect, and care for your happiness as I never can."

With unmistakable love in her upraised face and clinging arms, Aileen drew his face down to hers, pressing her own strenuously against it.

"Nay," she said. "You must not think that, in waiting for you or following you into exile, there would be any sacrifice. How could that be when I love you? Do you think that any home of which

you were not the centre could afford me peace? Do you think the love of any man can give me in an age the happiness yours has already done? Ivan, Ivan, you have sacrificed yourself for your country, given up fortune, hopes, career, and now your life for it, and I hold it the world's greatest boon that I can give up my all for you."

The Baron did not answer, and did not attempt to repulse the love again that had come in unselfish devotion to cheer the darkest hour. Perhaps tyranny would require his life; then, though the agony might be poignant, he felt the chain that bound this girl to Russia would be broken, and that, when years had rolled by till his name was forgotten, among other scenes, under happier auspices, Aileen might find solace in a happier love. But, at this juncture, she was his, had renounced herself in her youth and beauty, content to bear all things for his sake. For a short moment their lips met in that kiss of everlasting parting which brings with it a wild despair that no language can express. The girl raised her head.

"Only for a little while we part, till then I will pray Heaven to preserve you, my darling. Do not

fear for me, Ivan; there are worse things even than death."

"Yes; I shall not dishonour my line," he answered, firmly, as he unlocked her fingers, and gently but irresistibly led her from the room. The few words in farewell which the Baron had to make to his friends did not take long. A light promise to the Count of some future meeting, a joking reminder to the hostess that he hoped soon to be honoured, as escort, to the Opera, and then he turned to the Countess, asking for Miss Harford.

"I have my adieu to pay to her."

"Here she is, Baron," said Smaick, who drew back to allow the young lady to pass, his keen eyes watching her face the while.

But Aileen had not suffered so recently the most cruel blow that can befall a woman to show her sorrow or fear now. With an equal anger and pain which imbued with their strength her trembling limbs, she moved forward.

"You leave us early, Baron," she said, with a light laugh that had no echo. "Still, I suppose we shall soon meet again, and so I will reserve my lecture on your want of gallantry till then."

She had spoken quickly; but here her eyes fell on his face, and, thereupon, a momentary faintness made all grow dim before her. Only for a moment, though, for she held out her hand firmly. The Baron took it and clasped it whilst he answered:

"If Dame Censure wear your mien, young lady, little would any gentleman care how often he were taken to task. Till my scolding time comes, farewell!"

He raised the cold, trembling fingers to his lips, and, without another word or look in her direction, left the room, followed by Smaick at his heels.

An hour after, the Countess and her friend were driving home, silent and full of a vague terror they dared not frame in words. But when they stood alone in the Countess's boudoir, she took a glass, and pouring out some wine, compelled the girl to drink it.

"My child," she said, tenderly, "you have carried yourself nobly. I confess I did not do you justice. The Baron told me you had the courage of a martyr."

A momentary gleam in the brilliant eyes faded away into a smouldering agony as the wretched girl threw herself down on her knees and hid her face from the light. Thinking it was best she should be alone,

the Countess withdrew, giving strict orders that no one was to enter her boudoir, as her ward was trying to sleep off the fatigue of the night. And so, lonely in her misery, the poor tried one battled with the pain tearing at her heart. The terrible thought haunted her of her lover being found guilty. Exile, beside him, she rated lightly. With his love to cheer her, all other pleasures or sorrows would be naught. That sentiment which ladies (young ladies particularly) call love, one that cannot look forward to any future not consisting of full gratification of their wants and wishes, Aileen would not have understood now. She had bestowed her heart on this man, and having done so, would never recall it. The horrors that lay before them both caused her no self-commiseration. She loved one who had given her his heart, and mingled with her prayers was Aileen's vow that never should she cause that heart a moment's sorrow by any deed or saying. There are women, though few, perhaps, whose devotion can wave aside the petty vanities and follies of their sex, and while proving both comforter and companion to their mates, stand forth in the more glorious light of friend and comrade.

When, as they patiently awaited the news of the Baron's arrest and trial, the Countess would turn with pitying words to her charge, she would answer proudly:

"You need not pity me, Marie. I am his, and nothing, not even death, can part us. Whatever happens, I shall never regret the past, or what hardships may be before us, because I shall be bearing them for his sake."

The most painful trials were the comments and wild stories afloat in St. Petersburg. The news of the arrest of Pointesky had flown like lightning through the town, and, in spite of the reticence of the police authorities, rumours were current of important documents implicating not only the Baron, but hitherto unsuspected people. These surmises naturally reached the ears of Aileen, who, in spite of so much spirit, began to lose courage. She grew pale, and her eyes seemed too large for the worn face: but in society no one noticed it; for there, at any rate, her secret had to be kept, and though some deemed her cold-hearted to say so little for one who had been an intimate acquaintance of hers, none guessed the absolute truth.

CHAPTER XII

THE BRITISH LIONESS AT BAY

"A jewel in a ten imes barred-up chest
Is a bold spirit in a loyal breast."

King Richard II.

At last the perfunctory examination of Baron Pointesky came to an end, and his trial was rattled through at a killing pace, as the "court" jesters said.

Smaick volunteered to acquaint the Countess Hevna and her *prtoégée* with the result: sentence of exile. He wanted to judge himself whether his suspicions regarding Aileen's concern in the revolutionary movement were founded or not. But the girl was prepared directly Maïda came to announce his arrival, which happened during the Countess's

absence. As she advanced along the ante-room the *Pristav* eyed her sharply. She was dressed in a cream-coloured material tied at the waist with a maroon band, and a deep-hued rose at her throat. But it was her face the man scrutinised so sharply. The cheeks were too pale and the eyes much too grave and thoughtful for a butterfly of fashion such as despotic courts approve of.

She greeted her unpleasant visitor politely, and listened attentively to the whole account of the trial and sentence. When he paused, fixing her clear grey eyes on his impassive countenance, she said in a bland voice:

"Thank you for bringing us thus early the decision of the gracious Emperor regarding poor Baron Pointesky. As a friend of ours, we have been anxious, of course, to hear his fate. It is not every one who would, out of friendship, undertake such an unpleasant office as to bring it. You are noted as one of the cleverest of the protectors of life and property; now I can but consider you the kindest." There was just a faint touch of irony in her voice. Smaick understood her, though outwardly ignoring it.

"What a blessed thing, by the way," he remarked, counting the rings on the curtain-rods with nonchalance whilst viewing her out of the corner of his eye, "that the Baron was neither engaged nor married!"

"Why?"

Smaick was disconcerted. He had expected some show of embarrassment, and here he was confronted by a question in the most commonplace tone, accompanied by almost a blank stare.

"Well, look at the position of the young lady," he answered. "How sad a reflection that the fond pair can never meet again!"

"Is that a new law?"

"What?"

"Why, I thought your legislators were merciful! Indeed, if I recollect rightly, one day, when talking on this same subject with Sor Vichili, he stated that, as a rule, the wives, mothers, sisters, and also sweethearts could follow the exiles to Siberia or elsewhere; and, I suppose, he was correct in his statement."

"Yes, but the Baron has no kith or kin or fond ones to follow him into the Arctic region—br-r-roo!" and

he shuddered. "Lucky gentleman! not a soul to worry about, none to mourn for him," added the *Pristav*, with a keen, swift glance at Aileen; but she merely shrugged her shoulders as she leaned back in her chair and examined an old copperplate in a frame over the harp.

"Do you see that print?" said she, abruptly, "and can you read the line under it?"

"Well, it's French and——"

"It's pure Molière——"

"Ah! well, it certainly resembles French——"

"And the meaning is, that a man's friends must endure something for him. Perhaps he has some who will share part of his trouble, or, perhaps, they will shirk their duty. If it interferes with their dancing, their theatre-going, and their parties, I am pretty sure they will." All so carelessly that Smaick smiled at the pretty, ladylike cynicism, and then laughed in his sleeve at Sor Vichili having taken this dialoguist of his to be a little featherbrain.

There she sat, her whole heart aching with pain and indignation, and yet a smile on her lips and a changeless expression of well-bred indifference on every feature.

"Ah! how glorious to be a fashionable man!" he sighed. "It is the ideal life for one who does not peep over the edge of the volcano-mouth."

"Only you ought not to reduce the number of one's partners so often and so largely," she returned, merrily. "The next thing will be, we girls will have to spin with the chairs for partners; and, who knows? some fine day you sharp ones will discover their spars were hewn out of an oak under which a revolutionary speech was made to the boors, and they will be banished to the woodshed!"

Smaick laughed too.

"When it comes to that, I suppose you will be returning to your own country, eh?"

"England! oh! the sooner the better! that's an Englishwoman's wish. But my departure can hardly be for another year. The Countess will not hear of my going until I see something of real life. There is an estate of the Count's in the north to which I have been prevailed upon to promise a visit."

Smaick placed his cup down as he said in some astonishment:

"Ah! yes, I forgot that the Count had an estate

up there. But, after all, a man of his riches must have an estate at every point of the compass: very handy when one wishes to quit town."

"Forget! is it Lethe you are drinking! Now, I should say it does not do for one in your responsible position to forget," was Aileen's sarcastic response, as she rose from her chair. "There, I hear the Countess's voice, so you will be able yourself to tell her this news."

The *Pristav* rose also and greeted the Countess with his usual cold bow. Aileen went on with her embroidery work, every now and then casting a hostile glance at Smaick as he discussed the St. Petersburg news with her friend. She hated this man, who sat there before her gossiping like the most chatty "tame cat"; for had he not been the very one to arrest her lover. A chance sentence roused her from her sombre meditations.

"Michilof has been appointed governor of one of the Siberian districts. Rather young for the post; but then, he has good interest at Court!"

At these words the girl's heart warmed with hope. She had determined, when she accompanied her friends to the north, to cross the borders

and take up her abode there with a lady seeking after an exiled son. Now that Michilof was appointed governor to one of the districts, her task of getting passports from place to place would be easier. It was an heroic thing this girl had resolved to do, beginning with permission to travel in Siberia. But though the Countess implored her to give up her project, Aileen refused almost to listen.

"No," she said, with a look of determination on her pale face Marie had never seen before. "He cannot come here; it is nothing for me to go to him. Besides, I may be able to help others in the meantime. I shall not go immediately, lest they throw impediments in my way, but before his release, count on my seeing him!"

"Release! Why, if he does not come out, he is still an exile, and can never leave Siberia."

A dubious smile flitted over the girl's lips as she answered:

"Never! That is a word I do not recognise in this case. But, if it must be so, I am content. Ah! Marie, can you not understand that, with the thought of what he suffers ever before me, this life of gaiety would be torture? If it were not that I feel I

shall see him, though not till his imprisonment is over, I should give way to despair."

The Countess only shook her head. She could not realise the depths of such a love. Her own marriage had been one of family arrangements, and her naturally cold disposition had kept her from even the knowledge of such a passion.

The Baron removed from the capital, and the usual round threatening to keep Miss Harford too much on the move to do more than scheme to obtain leave to travel in the northern possessions, a false quietude settled on the house. But, in reality, the storm that swept away Pointesky returned to harry his beloved a little.

It is a well-known fact that the Russian police make their searches by night. You may be most innocent as regards politics, but when these hounds of the law enter your house, they leave nothing private, and the damage done extends far beyond the legitimate consequences of their raid. Papers and books are examined which afford no support to the charges, and such points as benefit rivals in trade, in some mysterious manner, are sold to those who derive most benefit from the semi-publicity.

Lately, the old trick of requiring admission at midnight by the cry of "fire!" or the announcement of a telegram, has become so stale, that no one bothers to rise; and so the law, in the person of her basest servants, returns to ancient practices, though tolerably brutal, and, with a cry of "Open, in the name of the Emperor!" breaks in the doors.

As has been said, the Countess Hevna was not suspected of favouring revolutionary principles, but, none the less, one *Pristav*, desirous of showing his zeal, determined to visit the Count's house. The fact that Miss Harford, with her friendship for Vera, might have caught her creed, grew upon him, and therefore, in the midnight hour, a group of figures slowly and silently issued forth from a deep doorway where they had mustered, and proceeded to the Count's house. Rousing the slumbering *dvornik*, the chief constable, with one man, the rest keeping guard below, ascended the stairs by the light of the lamps, and tapped at the Count's door. There was no answer, whereupon, bursting open the lock, the *Pristav* entered and aroused the sleeping inmates, requiring roughly that they should rise and deliver up all keys. Tremblingly, the Countess

obeyed, while her husband remonstrated at the outrage; but all in vain. With no regard for either persons or property, the men turned over everything, and finally retired only to knock at the next door. It was Aileen's.

The girl, who was a light sleeper, had heard the noise, and, guessing the cause, had hastily attired herself. When the men entered her room she faced them, barring the way, her face ablaze with indignation.

"I am an Englishwoman," she said, clearly, "and if you dare to lay a finger on me, our Ambassador shall know of it to-morrow."

The *Pristav* drew back.

"We don't want to touch you," he said, rudely, "but your papers that are not English. Proceed with your search at once," he continued, turning to his subordinate.

The man went forward, but ere he reached her desk, Aileen stayed him.

"No," she said, "I dare you to touch a paper or letter of mine."

"Aileen, Aileen!" exclaimed the Countess, who had flown to see how her friend fared.

"I understand. You are Russian, and must obey orders, however disgraceful. I am a British subject, thank God! and I repeat, I will *not* have my letters touched."

"You had best be careful," interrupted the *Pristav*. "A letter from the Baron Pointesky passed into your hands a week ago, and he who was a suspect then is a convict now! Correspondence with such characters brings ruin ofttimes on the roof that shelters all concerned and conniving."

Aileen saw the danger in which she might envelop her friend if she persisted entirely in her resolution. With a contemptuous laugh, she took one note and its envelope from the desk and flung it on the ground at the *Pristav's* feet. "You can read that; but my English letters are private."

Growing very red in the face, the police picked up the note, one of no import, merely referring to some books, and then, without another word, went out of the room and out of the house. What humanity could not effect fear could. This girl was rich, had influential friends in England, and was an old acquaintance of the English Ambassador. No, clearly

in this case inquiries might bring forth unpleasant results to an officer who sought promotion.

He called off his dogs, and went his way, still muttering like a storm-cloud only partly shedding its deluge.

The Countess listened still, fearfully, as the echo of their footsteps died away in the distance, and only then she turned, with a faint smile, to Aileen.

"See," she said, and took from between her lips a portion of paper reduced to a pulp. "I heard them coming, and, as I sleep with any dangerous letter under my pillow, put this one in before they could enter. It would have been a hanging matter for three or four high heads for that to have fallen into their hands."

Aileen still burned with indignation till she went to her and put her arm round the drooping shoulders.

"You do not know how we Russians live in dread suspense, or you would rejoice, as I do, that we are not dragged off to one of the cells of the *Trowbetzkoi Ravelin*."

Aileen kissed her, and then proceeded to dress

herself more regularly, calmly remarking, "We may have some more visitors to-night solicitous about our welfare! so I shall be in my reception frock this time."

The Countess turned away to regain her room and restore order among her disarranged and scattered treasures, grateful beyond words that nothing more than their personal inconvenience had come of the nocturnal visit. So little was necessary to prove a man or woman guilty, or guilty enough to justify incarceration, that it was a relief which, perhaps, only a Russian can appreciate to find that nothing can be fixed against them, and that even the wonderfully fertile brain of a police inspector cannot discover the remotest clue or invent the slightest pretext for sending the victim to prison, and thereby covering himself with glory. But, poor woman, she trembled for days after, when, in the silence of the night, she lay awake, and seemed to hear in the distance the footsteps of the despicable searchers coming with their doom in their hands. Aileen, brought up in a country that recognises justice as the principal, if not always sole element in the administration of power, was indignant enough openly to preach her

detestation of such practices, but love for the Countess restrained her.

However, the English Ambassador was acquainted with the fact, and St. James's being at daggers drawn with St. Peter's, as happens now and anon, he uttered several bitter things in the august ear itself, which had the effect of causing a quiet hint to the zealous police inspectors not to meddle with English people for the future unless they were on the Persian border, or somewhere remote from special correspondents of London journals eager for a startling paragraph.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ARREST

SMAICK simply saw the Baron out of the house. Sometimes they play with the mouse, as in this instance, to impress the prey with their omnipotence. He was, therefore, allowed to reach his lodgings unimpeded, where he found his effects had been thoroughly but tenderly handled and ferretted through. He lit a cigarette, and was smoking calmly enough when an unusual sound in the vestibule of hurried footsteps preceded the rattling of firearms, telling him his hour had come. But, without moving, he continued his occupation till the door opened and Smaick entered. Behind him in the vestibule were some soldiers with drawn bayonets.

"Baron Pointesky, I arrest you on the charge of conspiracy against the Government. You will find it best to surrender yourself quietly."

The Baron shrugged his shoulders and bowed to the officer. "I am at your service. I presume you will search the rooms; they also are at your service."

Flipping the ash from his cigarette, the Baron stood awaiting the next move. With well-feigned earnestness, two of the police went through the farce of re-searching the room, in which, however, nothing except an unfinished letter of no consequence and several books of a philosophical tendency were now discovered. These were taken, and then, guarded by six armed men, the Baron was marched off to the next police station. Here, on entering the presence of the head inspector, he found that, beside himself, were several other prisoners, two of them bound with ropes in token that they had resisted.

"Prisoner, what is your name?"

"Ivan, Baron Pointesky."

"You are doubtless aware, then, that certain documents have been intercepted which were directed to you. You will find it to your own advantage to give all information regarding those papers, and to reveal also the names of those who are concerned in this new revolutionary movement."

"Can I see those papers?"

"In good time. I am sorry that a man bearing your name and title, and of good position, should be a friend and colleague of Revolutionists and assassins."

The Baron frowned. "You speak at random, sir. I am no assassin, nor friend of such beings."

"That has to be proved. Think well over what I have said. Bring the next prisoner forward."

With a formal bow the Baron stepped back, and, four gendarmes coming to his side, he was marched through the watching soldiers to prison, where he was put into a cell by himself. His mind was long since made up as to his future conduct. To say nothing that could incriminate others, while he himself must bear the penalty of being discovered as a receiver of forbidden papers, inasmuch as they threatened the peace and order of the law and the Government. It might have been worse. Another prisoner, unknown to him even by sight, was lodged in the next cell. In ten days' time both were to be removed for trial. With a lingering hope that a public trial and a spirited defence might give his friends and adherents a chance of knowing what lay before them, the Baron asked for counsel. This was

politely refused, and as the four prisoners arrested rejected the only legal aid offered by the court, that of a lawyer known as a candidate for a judgeship on this same prosecuting tribunal, the one-sided inquisition was carried on quietly. And even thus the Baron might have eluded the instruments of vengeance but for the betrayal of some former correspondence by one of the trusted servants of the League. Not that this wretch was long to enjoy his bribe; five months after, while doing the regular Swiss round under a foreign name, he was found at the bottom of a mountain path without a compromising mark, and yet all who knew him at home smiled to read that the imprudent gentleman lost his life for not hiring a guide. It was some agent of the deceived brotherhood who had been too much of a guide to the death decreed miles away from his place of fancied security.

But the effect of his admissions were disastrous. Two of the Baron's friends were condemned to death, and he himself to six years' imprisonment and life-banishment to Siberia. The sentence was pronounced a day or so after the examination, and received with the same calm courage which had

marked the manner of the Baron throughout the whole trial. On being led back to the prison from the tribunal, he gazed out of the carriage at the silent, awe-struck crowd which stood by, as, with a strong escort of gendarmes, they drove on; his eyes rested for a moment on the sky with a look which seemed a farewell to freedom. With the words ringing in his ears which promised a life spent away from home and friends, he could not passively contemplate the future. His high aims, his valiant fight against the mass of corruption which sat in high places, and the fierce and often selfish desires of the extreme party, all was over. Henceforth he was dead to the world. To how many had he promised rescue and relief? as vainly as would be the pledges made for him. One less of a humanitarian would have had more friends on the Revolutionary Committee, and these confederates would no more worry about this "spent cartridge" than those frivolous companions of too many idle hours. Not one to remember! A flush of reproach rose to the Baron's brow as he recalled Aileen. She would hear of his sentence, and learn that only one course remained to her, to dismiss him from her thoughts. What was his future to be?

After six years' imprisonment, to come forth a broken-down man of forty-four years of age, and seventy from sufferings, and his remaining existence would have to be passed in exile. No, it was too cruel to wish even one heart true to him, and that heart Aileen's.

Upon high consideration, it was decided that the Baron, together with one Valerian Assinsky, was to be removed to Moscow. Here, in the great prison, our subject found less restriction. The prisoners were indeed permitted to speak to each other, instead of each in turn taking a solitary march in the yard. Shrinking from his undesirable companions, the Baron cared little for this privilege, and was neither annoyed nor concerned when one day a prison official announced that, unless each prisoner consented to have his photograph taken, he would for the future be condemned to solitude. Most of the men, who preferred the society of even the vilest criminals to perpetual loneliness, consented at once; but the Baron answered otherwise. Though the result meant solitude, he could not bend his proud spirit to the idea of his likeness being preserved in the criminal gallery for reference by the police. Moreover, as an

educated man, he was less of a prey to that tedium which befalls any secluded mortal with no mental resources to fall back on.

It seemed as though the more he shrank from contemplating the future, the more nearly and vividly the past recurred to him, and he had a well-peopled past, as is the case of those whose life is a struggle. Brave as he was, he could not calmly think of the years of exile which lay before him. A gloom, too, caused by another's suffering, hung over his spirit.

Brautner, one of his dearest friends and a faithful worker in the cause, was condemned to death. Of this man, daring upholder of perverse principles, the authorities were determined to make an example. As far as words went Brautner was only condemned to life-long incarceration, but as that was to be passed in the infamous *Trowbetskoi Ravelin* of the fortress of Saints Peter and Paul, "death" underscores the sentence. The Baron had, of course, heard of this place of torture, particularly interested as he was, and knew that his comrade must suffer before peace came; and Brautner knew himself what lay before him. As he entered the cave of despair, the walls

mouldy and reeking of bilge water, a shudder ran through his frame. Cold, damp, and foul, this was to be his living tomb unless the gallows ended his life. Seating himself on the apology for a pallet, he covered his face with his hands, and for a moment deep sobs that had no relief in tears broke from his dry lips. Shut in from the world, God's sky, God's fair earth would never be seen by his eyes unless he was led without for that supreme moment when the glory of this world faded into an eternal glory, where awaited him a patriot's crown. The man's very soul grew dark within him, the more as he knew that not alone did he linger in this dumb misery. In other cells as foul around him rotted fellow-workers, waiting their doom—not only men, but women. One day of sullen despair had congealed his fierce courage, and then, in impotent longing, Brautner rose and went towards the barred window. Thick bars, hiding the light of heaven, were encrusted with the scum of the river Neva, for not only does the river flow on a level with these small gratings but at times wells up into them. Such amphibious existence was enough to crush a Lacustrian, and gradually as the silent, weary hours dragged on, this champion of an eclipsed

cause lost all energy. The dim light seemed full of ghosts of murdered predecessors, and as the wretched man curled up in physical agony in the corner, his eyes fixed on the barred window whence the slow trickling water dropped with a short, dull sound like nails on a leaden coffin, his excited brain wavered on the verge of madness. It was one thing to stand before judges and denounce tyranny with the sense of personal sympathy surrounding him, although unspoken; but here was the thorn without any rose. With over-tension of the nerves, suddenly yielding, he laughed aloud, the frantic peal echoing along the slimy walls sluggishly sending back a muffled sound. The horror of inaction soon told on his brain. But as the echoes of this laugh died away, as if in answer to it, through the large gaps, never mended, in the floor, numberless dark forms issued stealthily. With a cry of terror Brauner leaped to his feet. This was no new fanciful foe, but a tangible one of terrible significance. Huge half-starved rats were surrounding him and gloating over their victim. Sometimes, when a captive was spent with fatigue and weakness, it was possible for them to win

by their numbers the victory. With voice and limbs Brautner drove them back, but henceforth, confronting this fresh danger, he had to sit through the night, his weary eyes only closing occasionally and his frame drooping forward in dreamy exhaustion, soon to start up again.

It is the memory of these famished visitors which makes the officials cognisant of the Neva fortress smile ironically at the imprisonment there being called solitary, and add: "On the contrary, each has playmates and to spare."

So one week, then a second, third, and fourth passed by, and the spirit of the man became bowed to the very mud. Once, as he sat drearily facing the only glimmer of light which prevented both body and soul being wrapped in darkness, a savage snap at the nerveless fingers, which tore away a shred of lean flesh, roused him from his stupor. He raised his bleeding finger and looked at it, a curious light in his sunken eyes.

"These bite my fingers," he whispered in a cowed voice, as though the words might penetrate beyond the massive walls; "but he who reigns as Emperor and Father bites into one's very heart and soul."

With a strange smile for that abode of filth, broken hearts, and darkness of soul, there arose out of the strong man's agony a prayer that the death which lay before him might not deter others from working still to save the country so dear to his heart. Faulty, imperfect in its method, with much alloy mixed with its gold, perhaps the pitying eye of One who watched the tyranny exciting so great an effort forgave the harm for the sake of what good lay beneath it.

At last, for fear that Jack Ketch would have merely an anatomy next to inert for his manipulations, Brautner learnt that he was to be executed, for Heaven knows what offence had been found out after those he was tried for. They thought him paralysed in brain by this time; but when led out of the den where he had languished, his jailers looked on his face to see a radiance reflected from the martyr's crown. Still, the brave heart, willing to die before it would forsake its opinions, had suffered beyond words. As he stood ready to bid his farewell to the world and the years he had dedicated to his country the onlookers saw the golden hair had turned white.

"It is strange how these men do not fear death," muttered a soldier to his comrade. "Another plucky one!"

They turned out five thousand armed men to guard his route and the place of execution on the waste ground by the Moscow Railway Terminus—five thousand round one frame of fleshless bones held together by its clothes. Here an insult which betrayed the petty spirit of revenge that actuated the Government, and cast on it a stain that all true men must abhor, marked the last death pangs of this knight of liberty. That at this moment he should not be able to raise his feeble voice in protest against the laws which kill not only the body, but soul and mind, there mingled a song with the last breath of the passing spirit, floating up on the fresh morning air, the music gamesome, the words positively indecent, under the scaffold and under police protection.

This novel and so ingenious substitute for the conventional roll of the military drum horrified the multitude, who pronounced it one of the most wanton, unnecessary, shameless outrages ever known in the history of Russia. The facts speak for

themselves, and it needs no pen to further paint what oppression can achieve when there sits in high office those who thus permit what every heart denounces instinctively.

The incident was reported to the Baron with the brutal jest that a wise man, fated to end his career after the same fashion, would get the chorus by heart so as to join in it and gaily depart this world. The materialism which had crept, we confess, into the Baron's principles prevented him, perhaps, from seeing the insult to a higher Power conveyed in this deed; but his whole generous nature rose up at this pitiful behaviour to the fallen. His own fate was still uncertain, but mercy was not to be expected at the hands of those who resented as ever the fact that men and women insisted on having a voice in their own rule and a mind undictated to. For the first time since his arrest, the stupor of hopelessness seized on his senses. What compensation had life for him now? In his bitterness of pride, he drew back more coldly from the advances of his jailers, who hinted broadly that money might materially assist in alleviating the unpleasantness of his position. But

the Baron's pecuniary support of his cause had made him too poor to be able to purchase a consideration which otherwise he dared not expect.

One ray lighted up the dark clouded horizon of his future. He might not live to work out his exileship.

A sigh of relief broke from him at this sole hope, unless, indeed, he could make his escape. That chance, too, yet remained to him, slender though it was, for on his track would soon be the experienced convict-hunters of the northern provinces, who pressed the savage natives and dogs into their inhuman service. And they call themselves superior in civilisation to the Japanese, for example, who never punish a prisoner for escaping, pleading that to flee is the instinct of man, but visit the keepers alone with penalties for their negligence. It was well known to the Baron also that, albeit convicts have escaped from the western part of Siberia, none hardly ever attempted to do so when consigned to the eastern part. And even when it happens a man gets away from a village, it is as much as he can do to get over the border. The immense distances, the rigorous climate, the want of money or other bribes are all obstacles to the liberty-seeker. When,

after hair-breadth escapes and terrible sufferings, the fugitive manages to pass the European-Russian frontier, France, England, or Switzerland are the only safe places he can flee to, and these are infested with police spies. These countries, too, under the influence of "the dynamite scare," are officially hostile to the wretch who adds to all this repulsion the universally abhorred burden of being penniless.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WOEFUL WAY

"Misery acquaints a man with strange bed-fellows."—*Tempest.*

At length, after a week, it was decided whither the prisoners were to be removed, though they themselves were kept ignorant. Valerian Assinsky, being simply condemned to transportation, was clad in the usual convict dress, a long grey hooded coat, marked on the back with a yellow ace; but the Baron, who was sentenced to penal servitude for six years, had two aces on the *capote*. Their rank, however, saved them from wearing either irons or having their heads shaved: a delightful sarcasm to men who were eager for fraternity and the abolition of class privileges! As they stepped into the van

Assinsky turned to the Baron, whispering: "We are going to Eastern Siberia."

The Baron made no reply. He was looking with an intensity of feeling few would have given him credit for at this place which henceforth was to know him no more. They soon reached Nijni Novgorod, where they embarked with six hundred other convicts on board the barge *Irtish*, which was to proceed to Perm. They were guarded by twenty officers, and crowded together in a caged centre, like wild beasts in a menagerie, and the discomfort and evils caused by this crowding was horrible. Here the prisoners were disembarked, and the political offenders were transferred singly to little three-horse carriages with a soldier in front, and a gendarme by the side of each prisoner.

The Baron leaned out so as to obtain a view of the forests and mountains which loomed up in the distance and stretched out far away. There were few villages on the road, and these were too thinly populated for the inhabitants to take much notice of a sight not unusual at that time of year. Night and day the procession travelled, and it was a positive relief to the weary men when a change of horses

gave a momentary rest to the continual jogging of the *tarantass*. Wrapped in a silence which he had no inclination to break, the Baron dwelt insensible to everything. Only once did his composure seem shaken, and that was when, as they jogged along over the moonlit steppes, the driver broke forth into a song, the sad refrain of which went home to the Baron's heart :—

"Ah ! those dear eyes, those eyes of blue,
They broke a gallant spirit's ease ;
Oh, cruel fate ! 'twas hard of you,
To tear asunder hearts like these."

As the words rang out on the quiet air a sudden remembrance of the sweet eyes of the girl he so quickly loved and had so quickly lost swept over the Baron. With an effort he strove to banish the vision; but in the waking thoughts of that night Aileen's words, the tender clinging of her hands on that day they parted, tormented him with the full mockery of a passion never to be realised.

Had he known how her heart was yearning, with a desperate protest against fate, to look once more on his face, to share his exile, to be ever near him, he

would have grieved yet more over the misery his sudden betrayal of his love to her had caused.

At Krasnovarski the Baron at last heard of his destination. He was to be conveyed to Irkontsk. This place is a wilderness. For many months the sun only shines two or three hours out of the twenty-four, and for days together darkness enshadows the whole land.

Valerian determined on escape, and had already arranged his plans. As he trudged along beside the Baron, both now marching with the gang, he unfolded his intentions.

"I mean to effect an exchange," he said. "I have enough money secreted to enable that, and it is easily managed. I advise you to do the same."

"No," answered the Baron, half shrugging his shoulders. "I will not give up my name or position, hard though it be, in exchange for that of some vile murderer. After my six years of penal servitude are over I will be free to wander where I will in Eastern Siberia."

The other man looked at him with wonder.

"Is liberty which you preached as the sole end to others become so indifferent to you?"

"Indifferent!" the cold, proud features brightened up with a sudden glow. "No; but I have not held my honour dearer than my life all these years to see it trampled under foot by a man who will sell his birthright for a sum of money."

"Then, my friend, we shall part soon, for I intend to effect the exchange before leaving this next stopping place. My substitute will enjoy my class privileges, and I shall have to descend to the chain-gang. But only for a time—then, perhaps, freedom."

The plan thus decided on is a common occurrence on these marches. Every two days the escorts are changed, and therefore it is impossible for them to make themselves acquainted with the names and position of the hundred odd prisoners. Counting heads is all that can be expected, and so that the same number of prisoners be handed over to the next caretakers it suffices. No questions as to identity are asked. After two days' hard marching the convoy halted at an *étape*, where the prisoners were ranged before the building to be counted. As the number was found correct, the gates were opened, and then ensued a scene of the

wildest confusion. Cursing, fighting, and pushing like demons, the convicts crowded in, and nothing could be heard for a few moments but the sound of clanking fetters and loud voices. The station, in reality a wooden barrack, had a yard formed of palisades in the rear. The building itself is divided into different compartments, one kept for the nobles, but the whole place is too small for the number confined therein. Those fortunate enough in the rush to procure admission first take possession of the benches, while their weaker companions have to content themselves with a share of the floor and the space under the benches, on the damp and dirty surface of which the wretched prisoners are obliged to take their rest. Discipline being relaxed, and the men allowed to mingle freely together, the hubbub of voices becomes terrible.

The Baron, who had stood watching the fight for the best resting-places, remained a silent spectator of the scramble which ensued to light the fires and prepare the meagre meal. A cup of tea and some bread was all he could bring himself to take, for, hardy though he was, he shrank with loathing from the disgusting scenes and foul language which made

this squalid barrack not an unfit representative of a corner in the Inferno. The meal ended, such as it was, the men were driven like wild beasts into the room again, foul with the filthy odours arising from imperfect ventilation and want of proper accommodation for human beings. Without offending the proprieties, further details cannot be given; let it suffice that the lowest abodes of our great cities could not present a more shameful sight than that which the educated as well as uneducated had to witness. On the opposite side of the corridor stood the *maiden*, a general shop doubled as a gambling-room. The owner of this place is a *markitant*, himself a prisoner, who makes "a good thing" of it. Being a much-sought-for post, the highest bidder obtains it, and the proceeds are considered as the common hoard. After forming themselves into a Society, a *starosta* is elected with an assistant. This curious system is acknowledged by the authorities. After a Russian has become a felon, he is allowed self-government! All communications directly respecting the convicts are sent through their elected elder, even to that of making payments on behalf of the community. In one respect, perhaps, this system

has its advantages, for a bribe administered will soften an agent, and cause even the executioner to show a certain amount of mercy when he plies the *plete*. Many a time had the Baron heard of this system, a curious blending of severity and carelessness, and now he himself stood within the four walls a witness to its active working. Those who know the fashionable gambling-houses in our great cities—we beg pardon, "sporting clubs"—would have turned with horror, no doubt, from the scene before them. With a strange interest in this new life of which he had become a member, the Baron looked about. Crowding round a table, covered with a *capote*, stood eager groups, as excited over their game as though they had staked roubles instead of the fraction of a *kopec*. Articles of much-needed clothing are gambled away, and the *markitant* may be seen in earnest conversation with a prisoner relative to the value of an old pair of boots, or, less seldom, a watch. Others, whose legs are sore from the friction of their ankle rings, are coolly hammering away at the chains that they may slip them off when marching. As the officers make no comment on this, though the practice is known to be largely taken advantage of, the self-

relief, too, has become an established custom. All they enforce on the prisoner is his bringing the chain along; so many strong the chain-gang—that is, for the transfer—the mode of bearing the incumbrance is immaterial. The more careful are mending their garments, while some sulk on the benches, or in corners of the room.

The Baron looked for Valerian, but he was deep in conversation with a convict in irons, and, to judge from the expression of the latter's face, the interview was of a satisfactory nature. Assinsky possessed money, which he was well aware would be gladly taken by his fellow-prisoner, who was in no way afraid of working at the mines, as escape was more possible there for him than for a political offender.

When it was time for the men to retire, Assinsky came back to his friend, whispering: "I have much to tell you later on; when there may be a chance of a little quiet we will talk over my plans."

When night closed in the two companions retired to the end of a bench. Secrecy was not thought of, as the prisoners were well aware that any traitor to the interests of the community would have been

killed by one of his companions. It is a democracy tempered by assassination, to parody a well-known saying.

"I have chosen Subovitch because he is the same height as myself, and fair also, and I am to give him for becoming my substitute, sixty roubles and a suit of clothes."

"And this man takes your place at the mines?"

"Yes, but enjoys till then my privileges. I must join the gang. You will not forget that my name henceforth is Subovitch, and I mean to make a try for my liberty as soon as stationed at one of the villages."

"Become a vagabond, I suppose. My friend, I always wish you well." The Baron laid his hand on the other man's shoulder. "Should you get away, let my other friends and fellow-workers in our cause be made aware of my wish that no one should imperil his or her life in attempting to correspond with me. All letters, as you are aware, are read."

"I will remember, Ivan; but I wish you would do as I am doing. Surely life has some charm for you."

"Yes, it has many; but you forget that I am to

be sent to Eastern Siberia, and am banished for life. My career has been cut short as far as its hopes go; but I wish that those who call themselves friends of the people would remember these words: 'Order and public utility can never be the fruit of crime.'"

"That does not sound Russian."

"It is French. Massillon preached it."

"Oh, a priest! What has come to you, that you draw your weapons from that arsenal? Well, we have not had any of that tribe on our march. The only holy companion was that former nun, Lydia Bribyloff, and she is gone, they say, to hymn up above."

The stern face of the Baron grew sterner.

"Better for her," he said; "it is but another crime on the consciences of those who condemn women, ay, girls, to the misery of a march like ours.

"That is one thing to be grateful for. I have no women folk either to wear out their lives in exile with me, or to weep for me at home. Therein you are also blessed."

The Baron turned somewhat abruptly away. Was it so? Yes, thank Heaven, no one dear to him would ever tread these lonely steppes, endure the horrors of

a Siberian winter, or, from ties of blood or love, waste existence in such a place.

To carry out their purpose of exchange, when the night again came on, the convict retired into a corner, and there commenced changing dresses. They knew that the escort given them on the morrow had no knowledge of them beyond their number and names. Subovitch was not an uneducated man, or else a discovery of the fraud must have ensued. As it was, when they reached Irkootsk, they were received by the authorities. It must have been about seven o'clock in the evening when they entered the prison and were taken into a large room, having three doors and two exits. One led into a room where the inspector stood. Then the *starosta* called each man by name, and when it was found that every prisoner possessed the articles already given him by the Crown, he was permitted to pass into a further apartment, where they were to sleep. The Baron, in his turn, moved forward, and the authorities looked at him curiously, noting his haughty bearing.

"Baron Pointesky?"

"Yes."

"What was your crime?"

"I am a political prisoner."

"Ah! stand aside."

At last all had been examined except Valerian.

"Peter Subovitch?"

"Yes, your nobleness."

"What crime?"

"Only a little forgery."

"Are your effects in order?"

"Yes, your nobleness."

"Two shirts, two pairs of drawers, woollen trousers, coat, pelisse, a pair of boots, and leg-irons." As each article was enumerated, the things were fumbled for in the bag, while the prisoner answered: "Here, sir."

Without another word, Assinsky passed out of the room safe. Five days later, he, with many others, were domiciled—comparatively speaking, free men—in the villages round about. His final destination, however, proved to be Talminsky, some forty miles from Irkootsk, where, after being paraded in the court of the *volost*, his register was returned to him, and the clerk of the village received orders to find him quarters. So, far, too he was a free man,

while the Baron had taken his place in the Irkootsk prison for the term of six years.

Only those who have borne the fatigues of a march through Siberia, who have been inmates of the halting-places, where all that is foul in sight, smell, and language abounds, who have looked on the disgusting and terrible scenes of human beings herded together in places not fit for the brutes of the field, can understand the sigh of relief that went up from the Baron as, for a moment, he stood alone within the courtyard of a prison. For though political offenders are supposed to be kept apart from other prisoners, and allowed threepence a day for food and a carriage, without the degradation of being fettered, the first rule is never adhered to. It was impossible to keep the two classes apart, owing to the weakness of the escort and the manner in which the stations were built.

CHAPTER XV

ALONE AMID THE MULTITUDE

"In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above."—*Hamlet.*

ABTANDREFF Central Prison is not very far from Irkootsk. It is a gloomy, solemn pile of buildings. For the accommodation of prisoners, there are fifty-seven rooms, and as there are, on an average, fifteen hundred prisoners, each room contains twenty-five to one hundred. So the privacy enjoyed (?) by convicts in England was an unknown comfort to these exiles. The Baron's fortitude was nearly giving way when, as he stood apart in his room, a medical student, who had interested him from the first on

account of his boyish face, sank down, and, covering his face with his hands, burst into those deep tearless sobs so terrible to hear—above all in a man.

"My boy," said a voice in his ear, as he sat with hopeless misery in his heart. At the sound the boy raised his head, and met the eyes of a grave, cold-looking man who stood beside him.

"Nay, do not shrink from me," for he turned away ashamed of his emotion. "You are a political prisoner also, I hear, and, like myself, grieve for the land that we may never look on again. I am a man who has lived the best part of my life, you may think, while yours has just begun. The better for you, for there is yet time enough for you to find happiness in your future."

"It is too late. I am condemned for seven years more; and imprisonment will soon kill me."

The old fire leaped up in the Baron's eyes.

"Be brave. What are six years to you? Come, tell me your story, and, perhaps, even if I cannot help you, I may be able to be your consoler."

"You are very kind." The fair, boyish face brightened for a moment, and the gratitude in its deep blue eyes touched the Baron more than he would

have cared to own. The light grew dim, for the hours fled by as curious faces peered at the two in their corner; but young Stefanovic sat still beside this new friend, telling the story of youthful enthusiasm and youthful rashness, which had led him when barely nineteen into a Siberian *perisylnie*.

"A father and sister, you say you have? Well, you can correspond with them, though, of course, your letters will be read."

"And not always *sent*, brother," said a harsh voice near.

"What mean you?" and the Baron turned to the speaker. He was a thin, hollow-cheeked man, with a pair of dark eyes, which seemed to pierce through the gloom like gimlets; the aspect of a printer, consumptive from long hours in unwholesome air, with nothing but manual dexterity and ocular expertness required for his task.

"Yes, look hard at me," he said, with a sharp laugh, "but I speak the truth. Do you know what I am? A compositor! You stare, my boy, but I am suffering the extreme punishment of offenders against the Government. My bond or word is of no value; I am prohibited to execute a document; I can hold no

office; my head is half-shaved: and though I was married, my wife is no longer mine; the marriage is dissolved."

"Your crime?"

The man shook his head. "That I refuse to say; but if ever Heaven grants that I succeed in my efforts to get free"—here he flung up his hands in a sudden fit of fury—"I will have my revenge. How these folk fear publicity and her great engine the printing press! It has battered down castles for all its pellets are paper; and if I ever have a case of type before me ——"

The loud tones caused several of the others to turn round.

"Take care, Clemans," one or two said in admonitory tones, whereupon, with a sullen recollection of where he stood, the son of Caxton suddenly turned away.

The Baron learned afterwards that he was a refractory inmate, and had on two occasions come under the lash. A perfect disregard of life made him a breaker of the prison rules, and the mocking way in which he received the announcement of any punishment to be inflicted on him seemed to repel

any manifestations of sympathy. The Baron read further into the heart of this strange, cynical man. Crime, it is true, had been logically punished; but now that the rights of a human being had been taken from him, and he had been placed on the level of a brute beast, without even the power to keep that which the worst of men value, namely, the hope of a future rising from degradation, no wonder the seared heart had become hardened.

Let it be recorded, to the credit of the Russian women, that out of, say, a dozen, ten wives of convicts will be true to their husbands, and follow them unmurmuringly into exile.

It must have been some three months after the Baron entered the prison that his health began to fail. In these long hours of forced inaction when he lay wearily on his rude pallet he learned something of the kindness of these rough men, even the criminals of all degrees with which he had to mix. Stefanovic, who had conceived an affection which never faded during life, was seldom absent, and perhaps it was the consciousness that at least his presence comforted this boy which roused the Baron from the despondency into which he had fallen. It

was known very soon that he was a political offender, one of the revolutionary ringleaders, and had been incarcerated because he had tried to help his country to rise from slavery. And whatever the degradation to which a man may sink, he never loses that one sentiment of admiration for a deed, noble or chivalrous, though utterly incapable of performing the same himself.

The Baron had not been a year in prison before he was witness of an act of insubordination by Clemans, and his punishment, in consequence, with the whip. In one of his desperate moods he had answered the gaoler with defiant oaths, and was now to receive the punishment due. Perhaps, to prove a salutary lesson to the others, his room-mates were to be witness of his humiliation. Stefanovic turned with an imploring look to his friend.

"Oh, I cannot look on this. I cannot view his torture."

"You need not. Keep your eyes on the ground within a pace of the prisoner, and you will not be noticed: but where is Clemans?"

"He has been secluded till after the punishment," answered the boy, fearfully. As if in mockery of

the scene, the sun, which rarely shines in this part of Siberia save for two or three hours in the day, was casting its faint beams on the prison yard, where stood the *kobyta*, or mare, *i.e.*, horse. This instrument, on which the culprit is bound, is a thick board, wide at the top but narrow at the other end, and inclines at an angle of thirty degrees. There is an iron band for enclosing the legs and arms, and a hole for the head. To this instrument the prisoner was bound. The Baron saw the hard face was stamped with a dogged hatred impossible to describe. A call summoned the wielder of the *plete* or *troichatka*. Perhaps there has never been devised a more perfect instrument for the torture of man. The human brain, in inventing this rod of chastisement, must have done so when actuated with a hatred of fellow humanity. Ten inches long and one inch thick, the lash, which is of the same dimensions at both ends, after tapering for twelve inches, divides into three lashes twenty-five inches long, and about the size of the little finger. All are four feet long and weigh fifteen ounces. Most of the fifty men lodged in the same room as Clemans betrayed little feeling at the sight of his suffering. Policy may

have thus actuated them; but there was a strange, determined look in the prisoner's eyes as he was bound to the *kobyta*. The courage born of shame lest these fellows should call him "coward" made him resolve to utter no word. As the pitiless lash descended again and again on the quivering flesh, only a deep-drawn breath hissing through the closed teeth betrayed the wretched man's possession of feeling, or life itself. At last the full number of strokes had been given, and Clemans was borne to his pallet. Scarcely had he slowly writhed in silent suffering alone for five minutes when the Baron's low voice roused him.

"Brother, can I do anything for you?"

The haggard face was raised by an effort.

"Yes, remember this when I am dead. Look at my back; it hardly bleeds: that means mortification this time. Ivan, is there a God to permit men made in His image to be whipped to death like pigs 'tendered' for Patrician palates?"

With his materialistic views the Baron was at a loss to reply so as to give comfort; he remained silent, looking down on the prostrate man.

"Is there a God?" repeated Clemans. Out of

the dim corner of the room there came on the still air the old sweet words, "Come unto Me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

As the tender, loving invitation of the Saviour reached his ears, Clemans raised himself still higher and more feebly.

"Who speaks?" he said, hoarsely. "Boy, is it you?" as, with his face still pale from the horrors of the scene he had witnessed, Stefanovic slowly approached him.

"Yes; those were the words my mother taught me, and bade me remember when——" He paused to recover his composure, and then added: "Shall I repeat her prayer?"

There was no verbal response; but down on the hard, bespotted floor, his golden head bowed in his hands, amid the rough men around, the lad put up a petition which, in its perfect faith and trust, fell like water in a desert on the warped soul of the sufferer. The Baron had uncovered his head at the first words, and stood silently by, and with an instinctive feeling of a higher Presence among them, even in their callous hearts, most of the others followed his

example. But though Clemans's spirit was bold, his strength was but feeble, and, as he had himself feared, the absence of blood meant a more serious thing as regarded his wounds. Mortification set in, and before the week was over he was dead. But not before the gentle care of both the Baron and Stefanovic had given him a new feeling of love for his fellow-men, and taught him to look onward beyond the fetters which bound him on earth to that home where he would be free. All thought of vengeance passed from him, and in the early dawn, when he spoke his last farewell to those around, the poor, pinched face reflected heavenly love and peace.

Whatever his views, the Baron's heart and conscience forbade him by one word to chill the faith which had been held fast to by Stefanovic, or disturb this new peace which had lighted up the dying bed of his fellow-prisoner.

After this tragedy the remaining five years of the Baron's imprisonment went calmly by. No events marked them save the liberation of the boy Stefanovic, who parted from him with tears. But the Baron was learning a new lesson in the miseries

of convict life. That atmosphere of bodily as well as spiritual comfort, within certain limits, which characterises the English treatment of prisoners, Russian prison governors have never even dreamed of. The men within the walls are offenders—the degree mattering little—and, therefore, must have no pity, no single thought bestowed upon their comfort. The idea that one may leave a prison a better man than when he entered it never troubles the heads of the Russian authorities. Evidently the doctrine that teaches how a criminal may be taught by wholesome surroundings and kindness to eventually raise himself is not understood more than the English understood it when they sent their convicts, years ago, less humanely treated than beasts, to Botany Bay. There have yet to be described by an able writer the horrors of a Russian prison.

With the quiet heroism peculiar to great characters, the Baron endured all the petty humiliations of a poor man where gold is the only passport to human consideration and the only key to unlock the gates of mercy. Any one who has entered a convict station, with its crowded chambers, its *maidens*, and foul smells, will shrink with repulsion from the

thought of what such a way of living produces on the moral character. It can but produce one thing —degradation.

The Baron was saved from this downward progress by his pride. Though a convict, he felt he had nothing to blush for. The act for which he had been thus sentenced had held no dishonour in it, and therefore self-respect had not been dimmed which, when once beaten out of a man, leads to such disastrous effects. It is well for those who skip over facts, or who only visit penal institutions under peculiarly favourable circumstances, to say that there is a great exaggeration in details opened out against their views. Are they competent judges? Of course, in all narratives of human suffering, there is, to a certain extent, exaggeration, born of personality; but still, taking a mild, even a prejudiced view of such accounts, there yet remains enough to disgust those who value the human soul as a God-given gift to be saved.

It has been said that investigation is courted. Well, let those who wish to come at the truth answer. Vast as are the Russian dominions, autocrat as is the chosen who sits on the Russian

throne, the power has no sympathy in it, the hand which guides the reins of government no grasp of brotherly feeling.

True to his resolution, the Baron received and wrote no letters. The feeling that strange eyes might, indeed must, read the written words perhaps of tenderness or friendship, he could not brook. Besides, it was best for the present that his name should be forgotten. The six years once past, there was more hope that he could effect his freedom. And while the other men discussed and read *their* letters again and again, he listened quietly, careless of the openly expressed wonder that no one cared to write to *him*. It might have been a sort of rude pity for his isolation from the faintest mark of interest for his welfare that led these men very often to give him their home news, and tell of many true hearts only waiting for the prison gates to open for them to join their husbands or brothers, as the case might be.

CHAPTER XVI

IN FLIGHT FOR FREEDOM

"No rule is firm unfixed on love."—RACINE.

A MAN was seated at a fire which was hardly alight, and trying to fan it into something like a blaze. He was poorly attired, and certainly, to all appearances, not clothed warmly enough to exist in such a region. As the flames flickered upwards into the dull air, the man turned to a wooden table which stood near, and drew the single tallow candle closer to him. As he did so his features were clearly seen: a man about forty-five, whose fair hair showed silver lines; a haggard face from which the sunken but still keen blue eyes looked forth. As he rose and crossed the hut, in a proud stride, the tall,

elegant figure would have been recognised as the Baron Pointesky.

His six years' imprisonment were over, and now as a *positenetsi*, or mere exile, he was free, on certain conditions, to roam about Siberia. Coming upon a hut which owned no master, he had taken possession, and here, by the aid of his gun, was attempting to exist, for it could only be called existing under the circumstances.

During the winter months which had just ended the darkness and cold had been so great as to necessitate his remaining for days together in bed, with only rancid fat to eat. To attempt to cross this part of Western Siberia and Russia in Europe was impossible on account of the wild tribes haunting the frontiers of Mongolia and Manchuria, to say nothing of the Buriats, who shoot down all fugitives (*Varnacks*) for the sum of three roubles a-piece. This reflection made the Baron resolve to wait till the spring had set in and the excessive cold abated.

His future was a terrible anxiety to him, as he was possessed of but little money, and was ignorant of the country round about. As he sat watching the flames, his heart ached to recall the past. All

had gone from him that makes life dear to man; and his love, the sweet little girl who had come to him, and given her heart into his keeping—what of her? Those eyes would never gaze into his again, those soft lips press his, nor that tender heart beat against his own!

The contrast between his fancies and the reality well nigh maddened him, so powerless was he to lessen it.

He was about to bar the door and retire to his unsoothing bed of skins, when a tap at the rude window made him pause.

"Enter!" he said calmly, whilst bringing his gun round to his hand.

A man came in, a vagabond, as such are called, clad in the convict regulation pelisse, well dabbed with mud to hide its colour, and a pair of cotton trousers.

"Can you give a poor fellow some bread?" he asked, after making the sign of the cross before the pictured saint, which is to be seen in all Russian houses, and which the new-comer had respected.

"Yes, I have half a loaf, and some bear fat

of the last year's vintage," replied the Baron, jocosely.

Regarding the visitor more intently, he continued:

"Is not your name Dimidoff?"

"And yours Pointesky? By Heaven! what a meeting!" The vagabond held out his hand.

"At your service. Where are you from?"

"The convoy," answered the other as he cowered over the fire; "but I call myself Mokrivach; by the way, I exchanged with another, as I was sentenced to the mines. Three times I have had a narrow escape, and now I am on my way to Teterieveno."

"But you will be discovered!"

The vagabond shook his head.

"I reckon not," returned he; "when I took my false name I received the address of a mujik and other friends to whom my assumed name is well-known. When written to, these people answer to having had a man of my name in the village, and so I am able to go there. If I were discovered to be an impostor, of course, I should be taken back to the mines, but there are always nests where a wild bird can get shelter. Can I sleep to-night in your bath-room?"

"Certainly, my friend."

"Just to think that when I was a man of fortune in St. Peter's City, I gave I won't say how many hundred roubles for the silver bath exhibited at Vienna, to please the French comedy actress at the Michel Theatre! Now I am fain to cuddle up in a Siberian vapour-bath hut! Ha, ha! Dame Fortune's wheel is a very ill-balanced one!"

The Baron led the way into an adjoining chamber. Here, the stones being heated in the centre of the room and water poured on them, a vapour bath is obtained. There was no chimney, so the place was quite warm. The ex-dandy sat down on a bench, rolled over on his side, and in five minutes was fast asleep, whilst his host and former boon-companion went back to the fire, to muse over this spectre evoked out of the past. He himself would be obliged soon to commence his journey to a more frequented part, his house was getting so well-known. But still this meeting with a former associate seemed somewhat to cheer him.

Ere the dawn had risen Mokrivach was up and roused his host.

"I must be going," he said. "I have to travel a good hundred miles. The further I get from the village where I was last *interned* the better my prospects may *turn out*."

"How long have you been wandering about?" the Baron asked, striking a light.

"Some three months or so. I shall take the Angara road."

"Scarcely safe. A man from the last convoy told me that the authorities are getting 'vicious,' as one or two have made good their escape. They arrest every wayfarer."

"Well, I must run the risk, brother."

Out into the bitterly cold, raw morning the gentlemanly tramp went sturdily, and the Baron sat down to his crust of hard bread, a revived longing in his heart to have news of the world he had lost sight of. When at length the spring arrived, the Baron shouldered his gun, turned his back on the hut, and set forth on his enterprise. It was still acutely cold, and weakened by want of proper food and a sort of low fever which at times attacked him, the unfortunate exile wandered on.

At last, worn out by fatigue, he was about to seek his rest beneath a clump of bushes not far off, when he perceived, in the dim light, a hut in the distance. He knew that without soliciting it, without even knocking at the door, that he would be able to do something towards satisfying the hunger which tormented him. The superstition of the Russian peasants is such that they have a very deep-rooted belief in the tangible and material presence of not only *Bogu* (God) and *Chert* (devil), but in the ministrations of the *Teljega* and *Domovoy*, spirits of good and evil. To propitiate these, and, therefore, to guard their dwellings and themselves from harm, every night, before the window is fastened up, some *krass* and *vadka* is placed on the sill should the spirits require either. As the "vagabonds" generally avail themselves of this refreshment, the clowns conclude the spirits appreciate the attention. At the same time, the incredulous do the same in many cases to prevent the stray convicts who infest the wilder parts from helping themselves in a more unpleasant manner. Many of these bear a fearful reputation for murder and violence, and may be said to levy blackmail on

the peaceful settlers. It may be, also, that a feeling of pity, born of their own past experience, prompts them to thus hold out a helping hand to their less happy fellow-creatures.

Creeping softly up to the window, the Baron seized the *vadka* and *krass*, and imbibed them eagerly. Somewhat refreshed, he resumed his way. But he knew perfectly that with the return of the milder weather the Buriats, those hunters of human beings at three roubles per head, would again come out on the war-path. He knew that they seldom scrupled to kill any wayfarer, if they thought it worth their while, and therefore was anxious to keep out of their way.

The forest he had now to traverse was a thick and gloomy one, and though he might be able to shoot animals for food, the Baron knew that to meet the head-hunters in force meant death. This fear prevented him from lighting any fire, lest the smoke should betray his whereabouts. So, in spite of the numbing cold, he was compelled to sleep in the branch of some tree, tied by a rope torn from his shirt, to prevent him falling to the ground. Yet the courage which characterised our hero never left

him. He had suffered more in his six years' imprisonment, where he had been fed and clothed, than at the present time. There, crowded together with others, whose conversation and ways were mostly offensive to his own fastidious refinement, the Baron had yearned for a freedom which, if it meant loneliness and intense bodily suffering, yet meant *liberty*. Hence, even when confined to his wretched hut, with no other food and drink than stale fat and snow water, he indulged in no murmuring. But there was growing in his heart the determination, like Clemans the printer, that if ever he escaped from this boundless waste to another land, both voice and pen should be raised in unflagging protest against the cruelty which condemned men to become, by reason of their way of living, no better—nay, not so well—cared for as domestic brutes. And this was the punishment which menaced noble and peasant, because they dared to formulate remonstrance against the galling chains grinding down their fellow-men.

He had studied too closely how one half of mankind live at the expense of others not to take the part of the prey, generally the more *tender*. By

others' lives he had formed his theory, and now his personal experience confirmed his deductions. His purpose became only the more firm and decided. This cause he had worked for, and from which he had been banished, wore a new interest in his eyes. If he who had always advocated the mildest measures was thus treated, what would less tolerant spirits consider it necessary to do? He had been no slayer of men, not even of those he knew to be corrupt ministers of justice. He had striven to keep his own and his fellow-workers' hands free from blood or dishonour, and yet those he saved had consigned him to rigorous, life-long banishment! What wonder, then, that the group of less patient spirits, seeing this, rose up, and, in fierce indignation, resolved to effect by strength what pleading had failed to achieve? True, from the number of "illegals" in custody, it was avowed impossible to give each a fair trial; but this only proves the system pursued by the Russian Government to be not only incomplete, but one of timidity. It is stated, as a fact, that, putting aside the Caucasus, Siberia, Poland, and the Baltic provinces, Russia has in her other home dominions 670,000 police

agents, whose salaries amount to more than 34,000,000 roubles! What does such a fact convey to any thinking reader? That with a body of men, recognised detectives, not counting private ones, the Government is yet unable to stamp out this revolutionary movement. It proves also that the patriotic propaganda has rapidly spread, and is steadily, though, perhaps, slowly, gathering power—a power which may yet work a terrible evil to those who will not recognise the claims of its upholders.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HEAD-HUNTERS

"'Tis not enough to help the feeble up, but to support him after."—*Timon of Athens.*

VERY slowly, being numbed with cold, the Baron struggled on. He had shot a bird and appeased his hunger by eating it cooked hastily over a small fire in a thicker portion of the forest. As he rested among the brushwood, suddenly in the far distance his ear caught the sound of a series of irregular footfalls.

For a moment or so, he listened attentively; then, with a sudden instinct of danger, he shrank down among the undergrowth so as to effectually conceal himself. Those sounds meant one of two things: either convicts on the run, or one pursued

by Buriats. Nearer and nearer the footfalls drew, sometimes more slowly as if those of a tired fugitive; then swifter, as if he were making vain efforts to out-distance his pursuers.

At last the bushes parted, and a panting man, with a stream of blood trickling from his shoulder, rushed past the Baron's hiding-place and sank down on the ground in a little glade on his right.

He was a pitiable object. His white, scowling face, ragged clothes, and bleeding neck spoke at once to his being an escaped convict.

Almost at the same moment as he fell breathless, two men leaped into the opening after him. With an exclamation of horror that he could scarcely repress on his lips, the Baron recognised them as Buriats. Their brutal countenances, their weapons, and general appearance revealed them at once. With a yell of triumph, they dashed forward and seized on the wounded convict. Then commenced a struggle, wild at first, in which the most awful execrations and foulest language were used; but, gradually that ceased, and in the midst of the lonely forest, in the silence of the morning twilight, these three men might be seen in mad rage and fear fight-

ing for one poor life. At last, with a great effort, for the convict was a powerful man, the Buriats mastered him, and tying his arms behind him, sat down to rest before putting an end to their victim.

"That makes five-and-forty roubles I have made this last quarter," chuckled the older of the two as he drew a handful of snow across his hot lips. His companion growled as he narrated how he had come to settle in the forest and meant to earn a still better sum before the short summer waned.

The Baron's blood turned cold as he listened to these inhuman creatures speaking in tones of triumph of deeds of cruelty without a shadow of remorse.

The convict made no effort to move, though he knew his hour had come, and that no appeal, no promise of reward not paid at once would deter his pitiless captors from torturing him if they did not straightway put him to death. As the pain of his wound increased, he shivered. One of the Buriats noticed this.

"Ha, ha!" he said. "Cold, my friend? We will remedy that, though we are merciless Buriats. Come, comrade, make a fire." In ten minutes a fire

was blazing. After surveying their handiwork with satisfaction, one of them approached the prostrate man, and, kicking him, bade him get up. This the prisoner, who probably guessed what treatment was in store for him, refused to do. The Buriat drew out a knife which hung at his girdle and pricked the man's back with it. With a sharp imprecation, the wretched fellow stumbled over to the fire, and sullenly sat down near it; but his captor gave him another stab.

"Nearer," he said; and with a kick he turned the man over, so that his feet were actually in the flames.

A scream of agony uttered by his victim caused the Buriat to tie his handkerchief over his face, and then, with his knife to keep him in one spot, he stood over him.

The screams piercing the cold air aroused the Baron from the stupor into which he was falling, and at the sight that met his eyes, all fear of being taken himself, all doubts as to whether one weak man could possibly hope for a chance of victory with such fearful odds against him flew from his mind. He had told Aileen in days gone by that a man can only die once. Here was a glorious opportunity to give

his life in aid of another. No thought of what his own fate might be crossed his mind. A fellow-creature was suffering, and he must fly to his aid. Grasping his gun in a trembling hand, he leaned cautiously forward, and, raising it, fired. His intention was only to wound, and so far he succeeded.

With a yell of pain, one Buriat clapped his hands to his side where the ball had penetrated, and fell to the earth writhing. His companion leaped to his feet as the Baron, parting the brushwood, stepped hastily into the firelight. His first act was to draw the wretched convict from the flames, then, standing over the prostrate body, he faced the two Buriats, his gun pointed at the unwounded one. Bravely as he stood his ground, however, he felt that there was no hope for him, for even as he looked all defiance, the Buriat, who knew his gun was not loaded, raised his own piece to fire.

It was a critical moment, of which the Baron felt the full significance. To add to his danger, the wounded savage was creeping, knife in hand, towards him. To withdraw his eyes from the other man meant death, and yet in his rear came up the revengeful viper.

The Baron had resigned himself to die, when there burst from behind one of the shrubs the report of a pistol, and the unhurt Buriat fell with one loud cry to the ground, a dead man. Immediately after a convict rushed into the clearing, and, seizing the wounded Buriat by the shoulder, cried out:

"Wretch, you shall not live to inflict on any other being the torment you have caused my brother;" and ere the Baron could interpose, a skilful thrust with his own weapon turned upon him laid the second Buriat on the earth, a corpse. His vengeance satisfied, the new-comer threw himself down by the dying man whose head the Baron was already supporting on his shoulder, and exclaimed, in heartrending grief: "My brother, my brother, speak to me!"

The sufferer raised his head and gasped: "You have avenged me; it is enough. Go on your way, the pair of you. Be brothers henceforth, you who saved me, and who have avenged me."

His last words were uttered faintly with a failing breath, and in their arms he died.

The Baron rose, and touched the other convict's shoulder.

"Brother!" said he, "you are not allowed the

consolation of grief. We must lay him where the wolf will not tear or ghouls dig up to carry off the head for blood money. Then we must flee. There may be others in pursuit."

The stricken man raised his tear-blurred face, and silently obeyed his new companion. The rude burial over, they departed, but not without first taking away all weapons of the slain Buriats.

As a last act of revenge, the convict, however, rolled their dead bodies on the flames. Then, silently and cautiously, the pair crept further into the forest. The convict was a tall, powerful man, with a harsh, forbidding countenance, and the Baron put him down at once as an old offender. But the love he had felt for his brother was the one redeeming spot in his life, the golden light lighting up the black sky of his ill-spent existence. The brotherhood was not necessarily that of blood, but of the felon's arrangement: the most sincere amity, quite fraternal, often springs up between even dissimilar natures, or, for that reason, of opposites, and amazes beholders.

At all events, that there yet remained the sentiment of gratitude in his heart might have been seen from his conduct towards the Baron. Instinctively,

he knew he stood in the presence of a superior, and his speech, though rough and often coarse, was to a great extent deferential.

On into the gloomy recesses they journeyed amid suffering impossible to describe. The cold, the insufficient food, and the exposure were beginning to tell on the Baron, who grew weaker and weaker, until one day, unable to move further, and unwilling to be a burden on his companion, he bade him depart alone. He spoke calmly, in his old, rather cold, decided manner.

"Take the rest of my food, and make your way to the nearest village. Yonder, if I mistake not, is an opening into a comparatively clear space. But I pray you remember this experience of ours, and let it turn you from crime. Try and be an honest man again if you reach home."

He turned away as he spoke, and sank down rather than sat on a fallen tree. Marks, the convict, looked at him sullenly.

"I am not going without you," he said, after a moment's pause.

"You must," came the quiet reply; "better save one life than sacrifice two."

As if cowed by the plain logic, the man withdrew, hanging his head, and the Baron was left alone. With a gesture of pain he raised his hand to his hot head; it was throbbing. But he made no other movement, and the last ray of the departing day shone through the gloom on the ever-quiet figure with bowed head. With the last generous effort of his broken heart this man gave up the hope of life, or even the desire to live. Yet, as he looked up once above him to the grey clouds, his lips uttered what he esteemed his own epitaph:

"I have given my life for a Russian. Receive me warmly, therefore. Oh, my motherland, on whose bosom I expire!"

Strange that, even with this knowledge of coming death with him, his last thought in the desolate steppes of Siberia should be a lament for his beloved Russia. Aileen was no part of his life now. He had, on entering the prison gates, put all hopes of her away. Her pleading to follow him, her protestations of love had been accepted as the unselfish words of a woman who loved him, but had not learned what fate really lay before him, or the years which must elapse before they should meet, though even that

was but a remote idea. And so this brief passion, so sweet while it lasted, had been put aside as one of those hopes which come sometimes into our lives, not as its governing power, but as a dream awakened from with regret.

The Baron fell into the stupor of exhaustion. The hours rolled by till there fell on the forest that hush which precedes the night. But the Baron lay there colder and senseless, lost to all the physical sufferings of the past in a land of dreams, engendered by the misery and privation he had passed through. So the comfortless evening faded into the cheerless night, and then arose the first faint streak of eastern light. As it glimmered through the trees a man stepped out from behind the bushes and surveyed the prostrate figure. His sullen face took on it a pitiful expression. It was Marks. Chance or Providence had made him describe a circle in the trackless wild, and once again he was beside the generous gentleman who had given him every crumb and bade him press on to the nearest hamlet.

"I thought it was a frozen deer, and I was hoping to cut a steak out of him," he muttered, strangely

apologetically, and remained in hesitation, a severe struggle going on between his good and bad angels. Gratitude had first been awakened in him by the Baron's defence of his dead brother, and next had arisen a dull admiration for the man who could calmly give up a chance of life that he, a convict, might re-enter the world an honest man.

For some minutes he paused; then, striding forward, Marks bent down and raised the sleeper's head. His face was white and wan, and the fair hair was wet with the damp of the night. Putting his powerful arms under the nerveless body, the convict, with some difficulty, as the Baron was large-boned, got him upon his shoulder. It was a curious sentiment that prompted this man hardened in sin to take upon himself the burden of an apparently dying man, when, in case of pursuit, his own escape would be made so difficult. It may have been that pity for his weakness had first roused a gentle feeling in this rugged breast; but it would involve a study beyond human power to attempt to discover the reasons which inspire us to perform either good or evil actions.

Now and again the giant would pause and lay his huge hand on the Baron's heart, which still feebly

beat, whereupon he would nod to himself and grunt with satisfaction.

Two days' weary marching brought him to the outskirts of the forest, and within about three *versts* of a village.

The convict laid his burden on the ground and looked ahead. Like a wild beast, he feared to approach the habitations of men lest his life pay the penalty.

But his companion—what of him? With a sigh more expressive than words, he turned, and would have retraced his steps had not his eyes fallen on a rough hut at no little distance. The door was open, and the absence of smoke showed the place was untenanted.

Gathering up his helpless burden, Marks went slowly towards it and peeped in. It was empty, and had evidently been deserted on account of its dilapidated condition. But to this man, who had seen no roof over his head for so long, it seemed a palace. Taking off his torn *capote*, he spread it on the floor, and laid the Baron on it. St. Martin gave only half his cloak; this man all, and in a Siberian winter.

This done, he collected wood, and, setting it alight, a cheerful light was soon illuminating the rough walls. A rude shelf, on which lay a bottle, and a broken seat, formed the furniture. But the man was content. He sat beside the fire, after fastening the door with a piece of wood as a sort of latch, and commenced to eat his remnant of stale bread and the raw flesh of a bird he had knocked over. Suddenly, as he munched away, a thought struck him, and he placed the other half on a hot stone near the lighted faggots; then, rising from his crouching position, he went over to where the Baron lay and began chafing his limbs with his rough hands. This friction, added to the warmth of the room, seemed to bring back the Baron's suspended faculties. After five minutes' vigorous rubbing, his eyes feebly opened.

"Marks!" he ejaculated, and half raised his feeble hand.

With a sound like a sob, the convict pressed it to his lips, and then seizing the now cooked portion of the snow-bird, held it towards the Baron, who clutched it with the ravenous haste of one recovering his appetite after an attack of sea-sickness.

From that moment he mended; but it was many days before he was able to rise from his hard bed.

When he could once more handle a weapon, they took it in turns to go out shooting, and a table and two stools were hewn out. The skins of the beasts, too, and the wings and feathers of the birds, gave a less forlorn appearance to the place. But though the Baron seemed patient enough, he meant to continue his flight, and his companion was quite ready to throw in his lot with him, even as a servant.

Night after night, as they sat by their fire, they discussed ways and means, and at last it was decided that their journey of nearly four thousand miles should take place within a month's time, it being then the end of May. Their route was to be through Krasnorarsk and Tomsk.

During the time that intervened the Baron, with a foresight necessary in such cases, conned a passport which his companion had taken from the body of a dead man of the same *tchin* (class) as himself. The name was a common one, fortunately, and therefore the Baron would be able to elude inquiries as to identity. This discovery restored the Baron's

spirits completely, and he went steadily and swiftly to work making the final arrangement.

Once, on straying further than usual from the hut, he came across a gang of convicts. A thrill of sympathy ran through him at the sad faces, the clanking irons, and weary walk. But that sorrow turned into indignation when, on looking back at the waggons in which rode the political offenders, he saw among them the face of a friend.

With flashing eyes the Baron regarded the convoy till lost to sight, when, turning, he made for the hut where Marks impatiently awaited him. His own imprisonment had been a sore trial of his patience; but standing as he did on the verge of freedom, those wretched men going to the punishment he had once felt and suffered touched him with intense sympathy. His passing friend might never live to see what he yet hoped for, and again and again through the night rose a vision of that downcast face with its hopeless eyes; a bad omen some would have deemed.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE UNLOOKED-FOR GOAL

"Love sought is good, but given unsought is better."

Twelfth Night.

"MADEMOISELLE, are you going out in the sledge to-day?"

Aileen turned languidly round. "Yes, Yakimova; tell Madame Tlminski that I am going round to some of the huts."

With a sigh that came from her heart, her mistress sank back in her chair. The fresh beauty which had been so great a charm at one-and-twenty had not faded, but the beautiful grey eyes were profoundly sad. As she reclined in her easy-chair, her dark dress falling in graceful folds round her, she made a charming picture still. The full,

lithe figure and childish contour of face had not changed in the least, and, save for the eyes, no one would have known how she had borne for the last seven years a martyrdom all the more agonising that it had been unspoken.

Out into Siberia the brave girl had come, overriding difficulties that were called insurmountable to a foreigner. Since her sojourn here she had devoted her time to visiting among the poorer exiles and helping to alleviate their sufferings. Soon her face became familiar to many a miserable family, and in all her drives from hut to hut the girl never ceased to look for or try to gain some tidings of the Baron. This hope, though unlikely to be realised, considering the immensity of the Siberian Empire, helped to keep her from giving way to despair. Any liberated convict or "tramp" who might knock at her door received what help and food he needed, as Aileen would scan each face, although always to turn away in weary disappointment.

Madame Tlminski, who was her companion from St. Petersburg, was a sympathising creature. Her only son had died in exile, and the mother's heart had imagined there would be solace in seeing

the land where he was buried. Therefore, when Aileen had asked her to act as chaperon and companion she had gladly consented.

And so these two brave women had undergone the long journey and subsequent hardships of a winter in Siberia on the chance of seeing, perhaps, the place where one's beloved one was a prisoner above ground and the other's beneath it.

To Aileen, giving up friends and the comforts of civilised life formed no sacrifice. With almost a Southern intensity of love, she worshipped this man who was at once hero and martyr. Once or twice, when seated in the cottage of some peasant or exile, she would hear tales of the Buriats, their cruel trade and ghastly experiences, which sometimes were fearfully avenged at the hand of the runaways or tramps, who, like Marks, hated these human blood-hounds with a fierce, undying hatred. Then the listener's face would blanch; for had she not also one dear to her who would have these perils to overcome before they could meet again? Strange stories, born of their Northern superstition, were poured into her willing ears, grim tales of the *Chert* and his *Domovoy*, and the way in which they testified their dislike if

offended. In deference to this custom, Aileen had always placed refreshments on the sill of her window at night, so that any hungry wayfarer might be gladdened on his journey. And gratitude deep and great filled her heart when on the dawning it was found that both food and drink had disappeared. In the glow of the firelight, sometimes, as she sat alone, the girl fancied that she could see shadowy figures steal up to the window and seize on the coveted refection, and her heart beat fast with mingled pain and fear lest he, her loved one, might pass this resting-place unknowing how this one within was longing for his presence.

One night, a glorious summer night, when it had become cool and pleasant, as she stood at the rude gate always left open for wayfarers to enter, a man came along out of the darkness clad in the yellow *capote* of a convict. So poor, so wretched did the figure look, that Aileen called to him in Russian to stop, as she would give him something. With cautious stealthiness, the man approached her, and as the girl held out a few *kopecs*, seized them eagerly. Then, with a hastily-muttered blessing, he ran past, and Aileen watched him disappear in the gloom.

Of course, owing to her simple way of living, the girl and her companion were safe from robbery; for had it been thought that there was wealth or any articles worth stealing, they would have been not only despoiled, but most likely murdered.

In this monotonous life any little event stirred the stagnation.

"What do you tell me, Carl?" Aileen remarked one day: "that two new convicts have taken that old cottage about four miles off? Perhaps they may be glad of assistance, because they must be poor to live in such a tumble-down place."

The Russian driver, who had been himself a convict, bowed down till his grey forelock nearly swept the ground.

"The young lady has only to command, for Carl is her slave to fulfil her wishes. Doubtless these men *are* very poor."

Carefully tucking up his young mistress in furs against the bitter air, he sprang to his place on the sledge, and in a minute they were speeding over the steppes in the direction of the next village. The hovel or cottage was soon reached, and alighting, the girl tapped.

"Enter!" came the response to her knock from a clear voice within.

Opening the door, which swung to after her, Aileen saw a man sitting by the fireside, whereupon an exclamation of joyful amazement broke from her lips: "Ivan!"

"Oh! God of goodness! it is you at last?"

It was Pointesky sure enough who rose.

In her joy the girl would have sprung to meet him, but something in his face checked her. It was less grave than troubled, and he was arrayed in full travelling dress, a heavy, fur-lined cloak hanging beside him on the table. For a moment there was silence; then, in tones which she endeavoured to keep firm, Aileen resumed:

"Have you no word of welcome for me?"

"Pardon me," he answered, "for seeming to be thus uncourteous. In this meeting I have my last wish fulfilled. I leave here early to-morrow morning for Switzerland. The journey is one of peril, and I am glad of an opportunity of speaking to you on a subject concerning yourself. Do you intend to remain here?"

"Why not?" she said bitterly.

With a pained look Aileen went over to the fire. She had thrown off her heavy ulster on entering the room, and she shivered as she held out her hands to the blaze. The Baron's eyes followed her attentively.

"This is no place for you," he said, dispassionately. "I urged you before not to come out here to this Heaven-forsaken country. Now I adjure you to return either to England or the Countess Hevna's."

"What can it matter to you?" was the bitter reply. "I am of use here, and can alleviate some of the woes of the exiles."

The Baron saw that unless he used a stronger argument, not one of friendship, but love, she would not yield or give up her purpose to sacrifice herself for his people.

"Aileen, none know better than myself the good you are doing among my countrymen and women here. It is a noble work, and one which I of all men must approve. But I ask you, as a last request, to give the holy work up."

His last request! The girl's heart beat fast, but she only said quietly:

"Even if it makes me happier? You forget what my life must be now."

"No," a flush rose to the Baron's brow as he spoke: "I have not forgotten, but it is necessary for me to go back to the day before I was arrested to explain why I thus urge you to flee."

A shiver passed over Aileen, but she made no remark.

"I have since felt that, in avowing my passion, I was doing a dishonourable thing. A ruined man, with a life of exile before him, I had no right to even hint at more than friendship. But"—he paused for an instant—"your unselfish devotion, your beauty, and my passion broke down all my self-possession. While in prison I comforted myself with the hope that you would forget my words, and return to your home, where any remembrance of me would be in time a painless one. Three weeks ago I heard that a foreign young lady was living some four miles away from here, working among the poor; and when I later learnt that it was an English lady answering your description, I guessed that it might be you.'

"And yet you sent me no word—no message!" With strong reproof in her voice, Aileen taunted

him, the shadow of an unspoken agony gathering on her white face.

"My reason for keeping you in ignorance was as follows: I thought that, perhaps in time, unable to trace me, you would give up your search, believing me dead. It is best, Aileen. I am going away to Switzerland, where, as my little property has been taken from me, I shall have to work for my living. Once I should have studied to blow up powder magazines; now I shall write merely fiery words for the magazines," he said, with a hollow smile. "But my hope will ever be to return to a freed country; any way, meanwhile my life will pass in privation, danger, and incessant work for the cause I love. You see what lies before me. Am I not justified in saying that that dream—mad enough even then—must pass away for ever? Let me take this comfort with me into my exile, however, that I have acted as I judge best for your happiness."

"Happiness!"

Low as the reproachful word was spoken, a pathos, born of the death of a last hope, sounded impressively.

"Yes, your future happiness. There is no sorrow

in this world, Aileen, that time cannot soften, and a love that can only lead to misery had better be forgotten."

He waited for her to speak ; but with her features set in a resolute calmness, the girl shrank from what she knew would prove their last parting in this world.

For a moment or more there was silence in the hut, unbroken except by the crackling of the wood on the hearth, and the slow, deep-drawn breaths. Aileen dared not look at her lover, for one glance at that loved face would have broken down her self-control.

With the ruddy firelight flickering on her graceful figure and shining in the depths of her eyes, she stood patiently, learning, alas ! the lesson every loving woman must learn in this world, that the love which is the whole happiness of her life is but a part in the existence of a man.

But even in the midst of her suspense, Aileen was willing thus to suffer if she could be certain that the parting would break only her heart, not his.

"I do not care for myself," the Baron continued : "the work I have before me will need all my

energies. I can still continue to direct and help; and with a hope of future freedom for my fellow-countrymen, I can bear whatever ills adverse Fate may choose to burden me with."

He spoke with the old ring of triumph in his voice, and with his tall figure drawn up to its full height he seemed once more that daring, if cold-tempered man Aileen had admired in days of yore.

Oh, how she loved him as he stood there, the red light falling on his handsome, aquiline features, and the firm lips loftily set beneath the fair moustache.

"After to-day we may never meet again, Aileen; remember me kindly in the future, and believe that the memory of our friendship will be the one bright spot in a very darksome life. Only say that you recognise that this parting must be final."

"Yes, since you think it best for you."

All was over.

She had given him up for ever. Not because her heart told her it could be for her happiness; but because it was better for him to begin his new life unfettered by any such tie. The Baron's face flushed.

"And not for you?" he returned, slowly. But

the passion in the girl's nature hitherto unrecked of because so carefully hidden, burst forth at this query. With her eyes full of a bitter scorn that seemed inharmonious with so white and wistful a face, she faced the man so dearly loved, and yet who had deemed her love of so frail a character that she could put it out of her heart at mere bidding.

"No, not for mine. But I will bid you go. If it be best for you that the love of six years ago be forgotten, do not fear I shall remind you of it. You would be kind to me; you want to see me happy. But it is a strange thought, this of yours, that one can forget at will. I will obey your wish, insomuch that, when this year is over, I will return to the Countess; and I will leave behind me a certain sum of money to be distributed monthly to those who most need it. Nay, more, if it is possible, I will try to be a friend and helper of the cause you love. But," and here the hot colour flew to the white cheeks at last, "never insult me by asking me to forget that I have loved you. When I pledged my word to be true to you six years ago, I divined what lay before me. I knew that hardship, peril, and anxiety lay in the path you had marked out for yourself, and

I cared nothing for them. And do you think that six years' imprisonment—nay, seven years' absence, can teach me to forget you; or, rather, teach me to look on the man I loved as a mere friend? No, no! you are free enough. I honour you for your resolve to give up your life for your country. I will promise never to attempt to meet you in this world again, never to look on you from afar; but to forget you, to cease to love you beyond even life itself, I cannot promise that. As I loved you in those days when you were a trusted friend, I love you now, though a homeless exile."

At the commencement of her speech the Baron had watched her keenly, wondering at scornful words from her. But as she proceeded, her face lit up under the influence of her love, and he was convinced that nothing had power to make that heart traitor to him; the restraint he had placed on himself gave way. The spell she had cast over him in happier days resumed its sway. What if joy might be? that without doing a cruel thing to the girl he loved he could take her to himself, and let her love, so devoted and true, be a solace to him in his hours of rebuffs and disconsolation? However he might long

for her, long to have those clinging arms about him again, and to see the love-light in her sweet eyes, he felt that to ask or to allow her to share his life was helping her to sacrifice herself. Yet, looking at her in all her renewed fascination, he knew that every word she uttered came from her heart. The past years of silent separation had not killed the love she had vowed once should always be his. Happier with him! She had said so. Willing to bear all so long as they were together! It was a sore temptation. Was it possible that his love could recompense her for exile, poverty, anxiety, and fear?

"I have placed it all before you," he said, slowly. "You know what you are to me, and what it has cost me to repel you. Aware of this miserable future, Aileen, answer me this: Will my poor love recompense you for all you must lose? satisfy you so completely that you will give up the world for its sake?" The suddenly tender tones vibrated to the girl's very heart; but she made no effort to take his outstretched hands.

"No, I will not be a hindrance to you, or an anxiety, when you will have so much to weary and trouble you in your new career. We must part; it

is better for you, and I will be patient in the hope that, when this life is over, we shall meet again. Till then, Ivan, my daily, almost hourly prayer shall be for your happiness and success."

"Then, you will leave me?" he observed slowly.

Aileen gave him one despairing look as she moved to leave the hut. But at sight of the stern composure with which he bore even this last giving-up of his love, her courage failed her, and she sank upon the rough wooden seat. With the old passion invigorating his tired frame, the Baron hastily crossed the room, and, kneeling down beside her, put his arms round her as he exclaimed:

"No, no! you are mine, Aileen. Come what will, nothing shall part us now. Only repeat that you are content to give up all for love's sake."

"For love's sake! Ah, Ivan!" as he drew her yet closer and closer to his breast, and pressed his lips passionately to hers, "in giving up home, country, friends, and everything the world counts dear, I do it without a sigh, for your love is not only my happiness, but my all, my very life!"

And thus dawned on the dark horizon of this patriot's future a light which, in storm or peril,

never went out. It was the peace and happiness of a life wholly dedicated to a work noble in its unselfishness and grand in its patient suffering, far from the beloved land not yet free enough to be worthy to shelter such a valuable son.

THE END.

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